

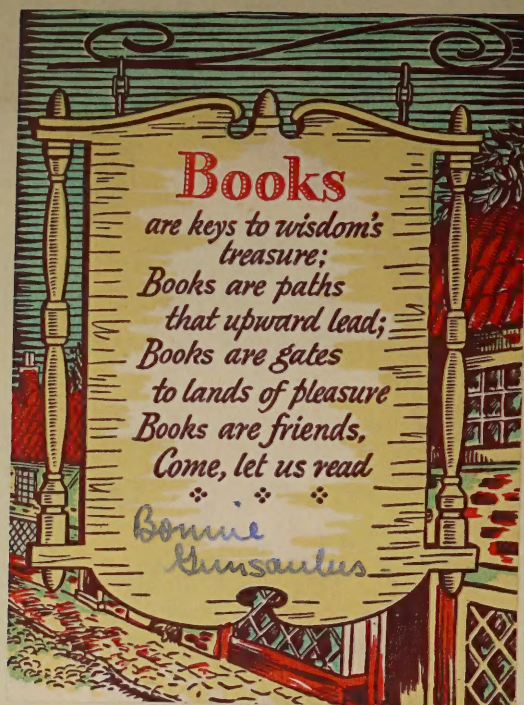
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The Land of Lafitte the Pirate



WITH A FOREWORD BY *Lyle Saxon*

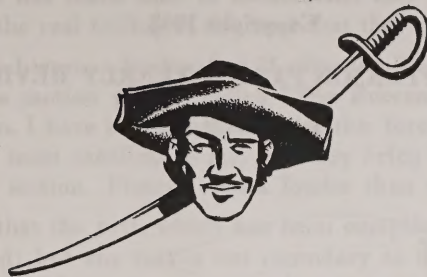


PHOTOGRAPHY BY

Eugene Delcroix

DRAWINGS BY

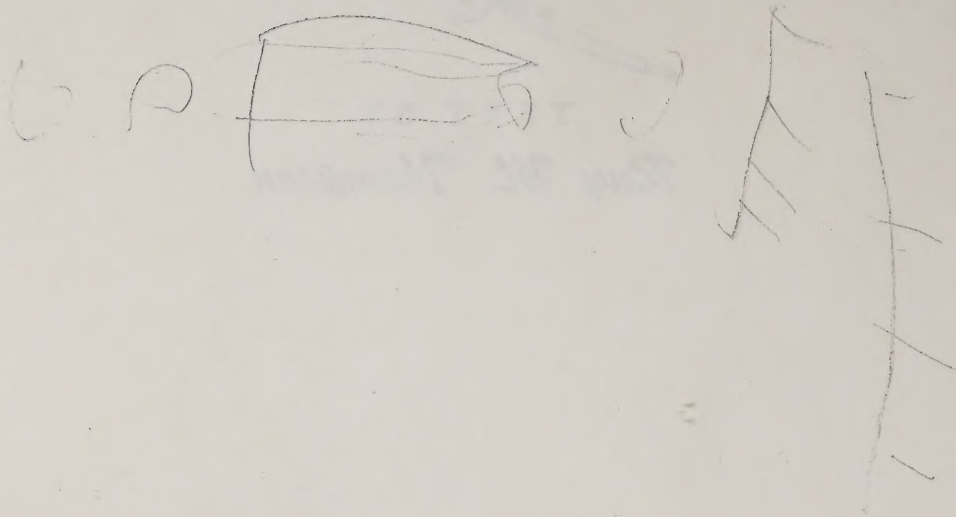
Tilden Landry



TEXT BY

Ray M. Thompson

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Foreword

The publishers have asked me to write a foreword to this book "The Land of Lafitte the Pirate." I can think of nothing that I'd rather do. Grand Isle, Grand Terre, Chênrière Caminada—the part of Louisiana where the pirates lived more than a century ago — have always pleased me and interested me.



It is a strange and intriguing country, rich in romance and legend, a country where oleanders grow and where stunted oak trees lean away from the salt spray of the sea. There is a quality about it, a sinister quality, and it is beautiful. These illustrations tell the story better than any words of mine. It is a collection that has taken time to accumulate, and these camera and pen sketches interpret the real feeling of the land that they portray.

Some years ago I wrote a book called "Lafitte the Pirate," from which Cecil B. DeMille made a motion picture called "The Buccaneer." And, I suppose that, for this reason, I have been asked to write this foreword. The pictures of the Lafitte country seem excellent to me, and they bring to life the terrain and the people of that section. Pictures speak louder than words.

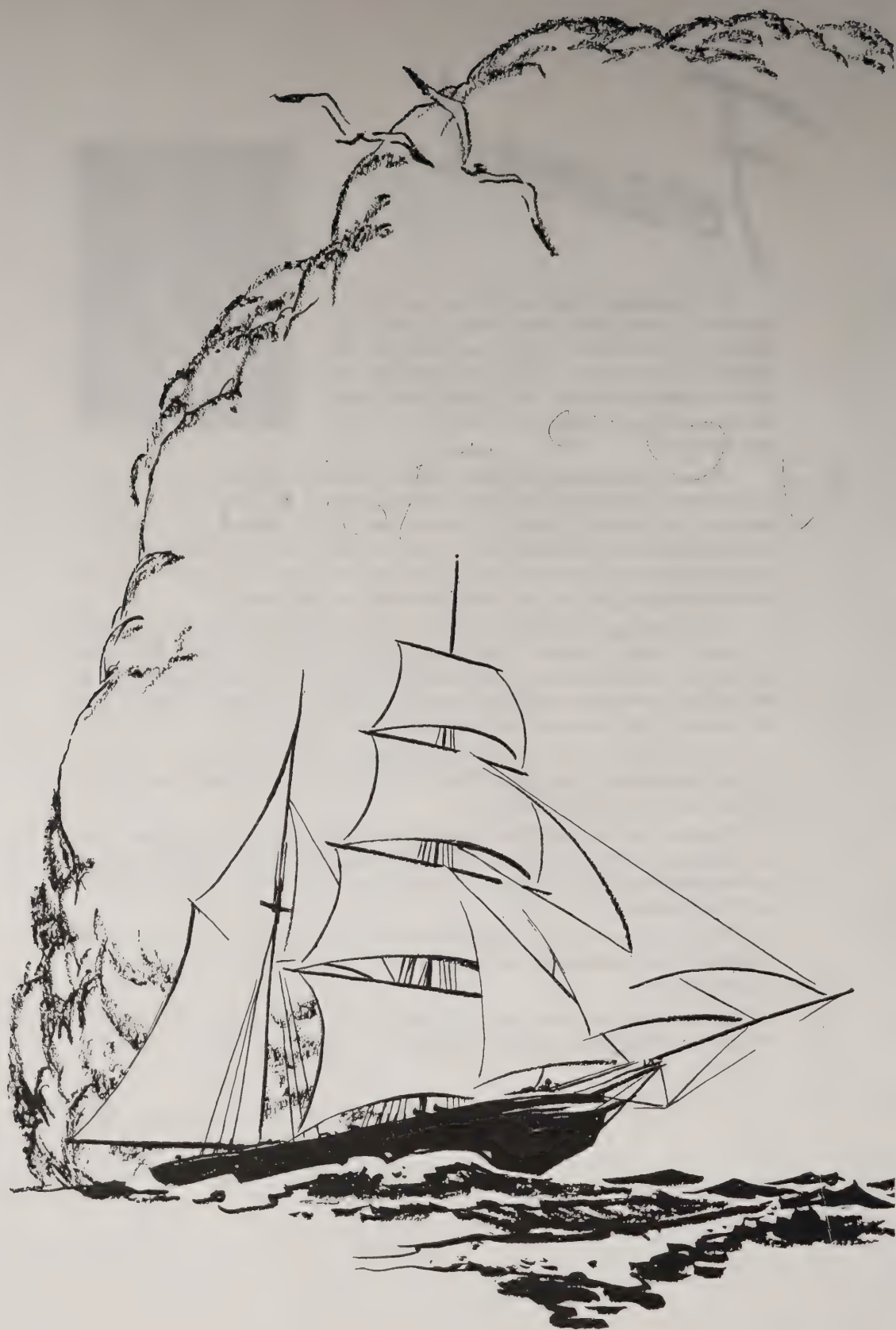
I am assured that the text, which has been compiled from many sources, is fully documented; but any text is but secondary to the illustrations of this fascinating and beautiful country.

Traveling south from New Orleans, through the labyrinth of waterways, one finds the bright archipelago of islands lying just off the coast of Louisiana in the grey-green Gulf of Mexico. It is surprising that so few people have visited these islands.

When the war is over, and when life resumes its normal course, it will be possible for the traveler, the tourist, to visit the islands and to meet the people who live there.

In the meantime, this group of pictures must suffice. And I am grateful that the publishers have arranged to make the collection available to the public.

Lyle Saxon



INTRODUCTION

In Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, lies the Barataria country. It is the bayouland where Jean Lafitte and his smugglers created a chapter in American folklore as romantic as Robinhood and his merry men in England or Villon and his rascals in France.

For years, we have been asked to tell the story of this beautiful "land" of Lafitte in pictures as the story of the "band" of Lafitte has already been told in words.

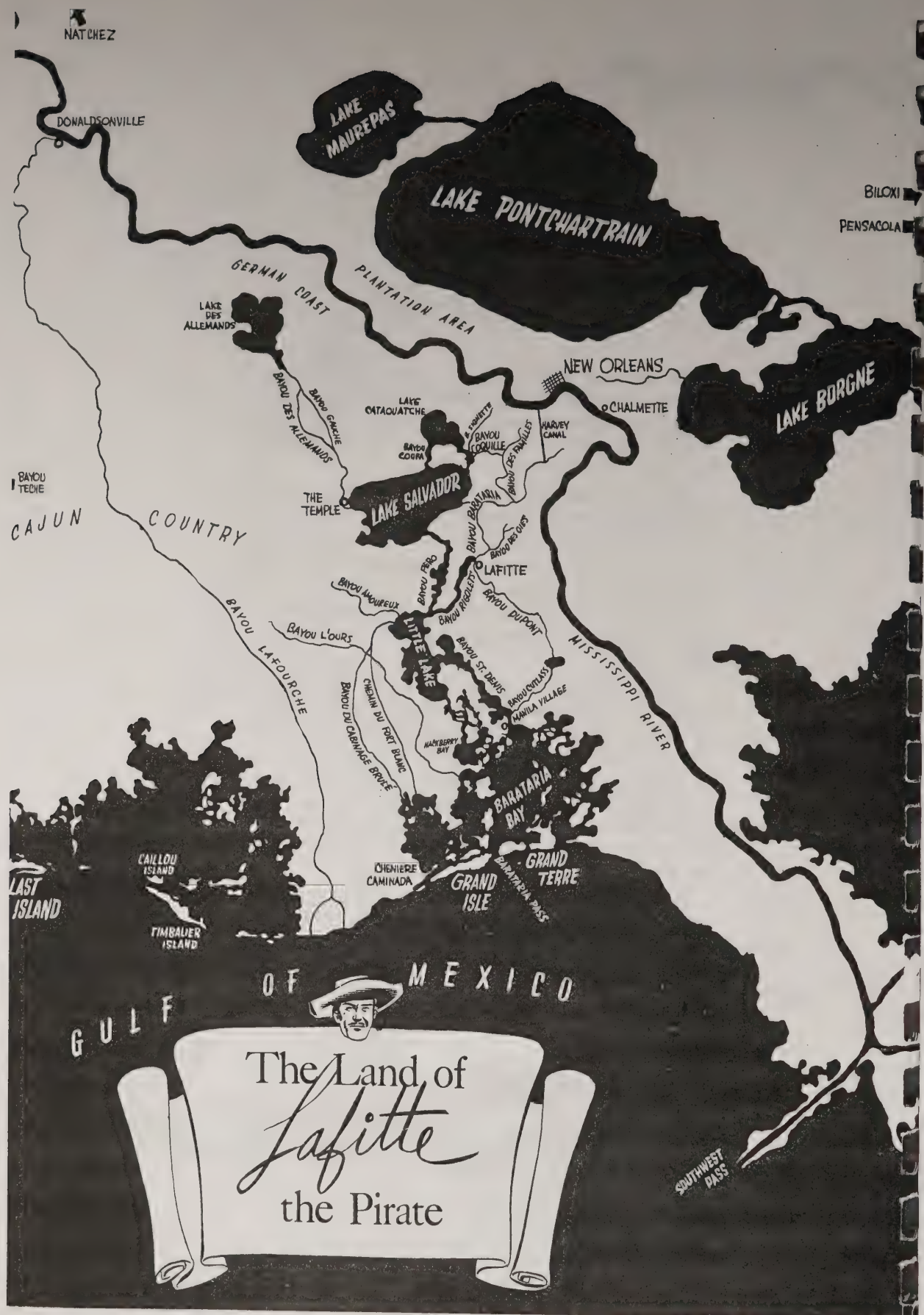
We have finally accepted the responsibility but only after we had secured the services of two artists — one with camera and the other with brush — whose years of patient study of this mysterious land are revealed in our illustrations.

Eugene Delcroix, whose Mother was the first school-teacher on Grand Isle, has patiently awaited the moods of the sun and shadows, some times for days, to catch the artistic photographs reproduced in this book.

Tilden Landry, with French blood in his veins and a lifetime of living in this bayouland in his art, has transferred to paper the results of his intimate knowledge of the customs, moods and people of this strange country.

We have, in this book, combined the beauty of the land with its history — and we hope that you will enjoy the result as well as we enjoyed the preparation.

THE PUBLISHERS.



The Land of Lafitte the Pirate

This is a land of deceptive distance.

Few Americans realize, until they actually visit Louisiana, that between New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico lies a great semi-liquid wilderness through which the Mississippi twists and turns for over a hundred miles.

It is a maze of streams and swamps generously strewn with oak topped mounds or *chênières*, ideal for either habitation or hiding—a confusion of lakes and bayous so interwoven that, back in the days of Lafitte, an experienced boatman could make a hundred round trips to New Orleans and never exactly follow the same route twice.

Here is a land still as primitive as the time when the Baratarians lived, looted and lost their pursuers in its depths—a land through which a road fit for motors has been built only within the last ten years.

Here is a land over which Nature has scattered beauty in reckless abandon; sand and sea . . . sunsets and soft woodland shadows . . . brilliant blooms and sombre Spanish Moss . . . stormy shores and calm inlets . . . contrast and color and constant variety.

We believe you will love The Land of Lafitte as much for its own charm as for the picaresque characters it sheltered.



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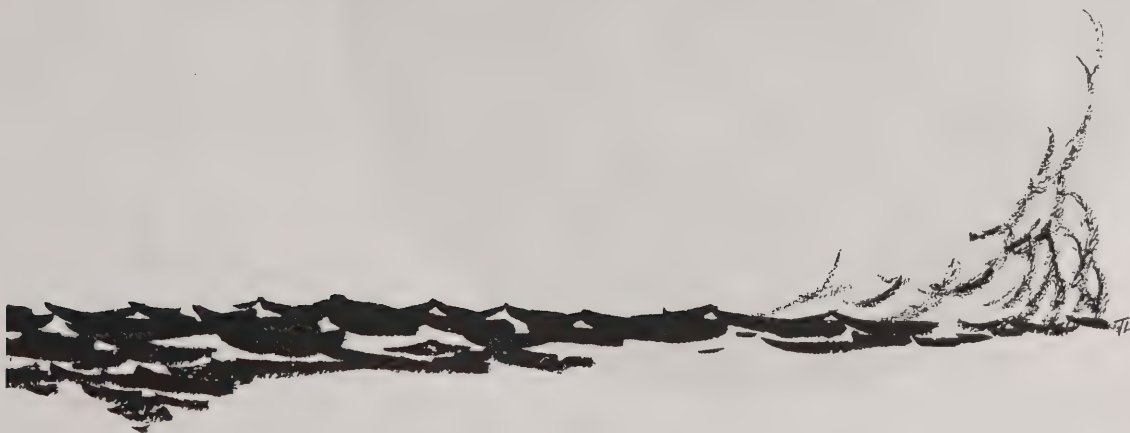
HIS story starts shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, about 1804. Creole New Orleans had just gone through the most exciting experience of her career. In the short space of twenty hectic days the flags of three separate governments had flown over her Place d'Armes.

Her head was still whirling. She was as confused over her new freedom as a giddy girl. Too many things were happening for this young American city to behave sedately or think clearly.

So . . . it was really not strange that New Orleans could not remember later from what boat, or even in what year, the two Frenchmen Jean and Pierre Lafitte landed. There were so many ships and so many strangers arriving.

Especially was it hard to remember when, in those days, men bawled or brawled themselves into public attention or duelled themselves into eternity.

The Lafittes were quiet and unobtrusive at first and, therefore, unnoticed until . . .



TWO UNUSUAL BLACKSMITHS WHO NEVER SOILED THEIR SHIRTS

Between 1806 and 1808 New Orleans gradually became aware . . .

. . . that a certain blacksmith shop on Bourbon Street was — well, other than a law abiding forge. The hot metal hissed all day long in a perfectly normal manner; but it was first whispered, then muttered and finally openly discussed that horses of a different color were being shod there.

Yes, you're right! The owners were those Lafitte brothers who had sailed in so quietly several years before. In the meantime they had just as quietly acquired a business — or, a front, as we'd call it nowadays.

At the time of the dawning public interest in the Lafitte activities actually the only known facts about their past (and to be perfectly frank with you nothing new has been added since) were that they were French, were poor when they arrived and were now making money faster than mere smithing justified.

However, it was obvious Jean and Pierre Lafitte were gentlemen. They did no actual work in their shop. Big black bucks swung the sledges and shod the mares. Their only discernible assets at the time seemed to be their education and breeding and ability to make friends. New Orleans had not yet had a chance to appraise the brains behind Jean's bold, black eyes or the daring in the bulky, quiet Pierre.

New Orleans grinned when it finally became common knowledge that the Lafittes were connected with the prevailing racket of the times — smuggling. Grinned and approved — that is, the people did, not the authorities.

Smuggling was a community habit inherited from the Spanish regime and tolerated under the French rule. It had started originally because Spain decreed that her American colonies should do business only with Spain. Well, even the local Spanish Governors knew that was impractical — so, while they could not officially revoke the law they could, and did, overlook a reasonable amount of smuggling.

When Governor Claiborne and the U. S. Government took over in 1803, smuggling was very popular with the people. Remember how prohibition flourished in our own 1920's — how big racketeers were national figures and people had their favorite bootleggers?

In modern vernacular Pierre and Jean Lafitte were merely a couple of popular local bootleggers (or smugglers) with whom the majority of the people were doing business.

And, the mob that controlled the smuggling racket was the Baratarians — with headquarters on Grand Terre and Grand Isle.



New Orleans today shows its visitors this Lafitte Blacksmith Shop at 941 Bourbon. And, at the Louisiana State Museum is a reproduction of a typical smithy of that day, as shown in the circle.

FISHERMEN WHO MADE A LIVING WITHOUT FISHING

Look at the map of The Land of Lafitte.

Straight down from New Orleans, through that interminable tangle of marshes, bayous, lakes and bays, you will spot two islands guarding the gateway to the Gulf — Grand Isle and Grand Terre.

Here lived the Baratarians, ostensibly fishermen. However, their very name gives them away. Barataria, traced back through its etymology, means "cheap things." Yes, fishing was only a blind. Their real business was the distribution of contraband at popular prices.

From the ships of privateers, which could pull in from possible pursuit through tricky Barataria Pass between Grand Isle and Grand Terre, into the calm and concealment of Barataria Bay, these enterprising fishermen secured booty from all lands which they paddled to New Orleans and disposed of. For all concerned, this was a profitable but comparatively small business when the Lafittes became what we would call today their sales agents.

In 1803, when the Louisiana Purchase made them American citizens, the census says there were only 101 Baratarians. But by 1808, when all New Orleans had become fully familiar with the real vocation of the Lafittes, the colony had multiplied several times. Events of earth-rocking importance had occurred in the meantime — all sardonically shuffled by Fate — that turned a strictly local and peaceful smuggling business into a dangerous racket so big that it finally tangled with the American Navy.

It was a beautiful place — this home of the Baratarians. It's still a Paradise, 140 years later. The finest surf bathing in North America will some day be the gift of these Baratarians to the land they first cheated and later offered their lives to stop somebody else from stealing outright.

No wonder the Baratarians could carry on their smuggling and slave running and piracy unhindered for so long in those days! No wonder — when still in 1943 a hundred and thirty million Americans have not yet discovered the real treasure those people left — the golden sands at Grand Isle. This is one of the few remaining spots in America where the land still looks like it did a century and a half ago.

Because so much more comes later we will give you just a glimpse now of Barataria, even as it was in those days — with stately palms keeping a lofty lookout for Claiborne's men.

A perfect pirate setting — isn't it?



THE CITY OF CONTRAST AND CONFUSION

Let's go back to New Orleans where the Lafittes, as city agents for the Baratarians smugglers, are building quite a business.

Jean has just persuaded Pierre that they need a retail outlet — a shop where the jewels and rich fabrics and loot from the necks and persons of Ladies and Lords caught on the high seas can be displayed to local customers. The shop is later opened somewhere along this street shown on the opposite page — famous Royal Street — where, to this day, old world charm and quaint shops still attract the passer-by.

New Orleans at that time was different from any other American city. It was a walled town, built on the bend of the river. That's where it gets its nickname "Crescent City." Ramparts of logs enclosed the town on the land sides beyond which was a moat forty feet wide and seven feet deep. Through four gates of the city, closed at night, passed the traffic.

In the middle of the town were the Cabildo, the Place d'Armes (now called Jackson Square) and the St. Louis Cathedral. Here the church and government tried to guide the strange combination of Creole and American that made up the population.

In 1808 the city could boast only about 20,000 people but it was admittedly one of the greatest seaports of America. Ships and river craft jammed the water front two and three deep.

There was more activity on New Orleans' streets than in Philadelphia, then America's largest city. Backwoodsmen met sailors from every country in the world. Rude carts with wheels and axles of solid wood creaked through the crowded streets. It is said the Spanish Governors required such carts because the squeaking discouraged smuggling. Fine carriages jostled rough, tough Kentuckians on foot. Free men of color and aristocratic Creoles picked their way through the mud holes.

The Creoles, you know, were the descendants of the old Spanish and French families — the bluebloods of New Orleans. They predominated the population. And, while the new Americans were slowly gaining footholds, the city was French controlled.

It was during this period of confusion, when French culture and American rough and ready independence were struggling to find a common ground, that smuggling flourished and the Lafittes fared well. Since they were French and Governor Claiborne an American, it was not strange that Jean was popular and the people inclined to ignore the new, upstart authority of their Governor.



THE LAFITTES MAKE FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE

In those days, most everything was discussed and decided in New Orleans' famous coffee shops and public houses. After Mass on Sunday the shops and markets were busy places and Jean and Pierre were seen more and more with men of influence in the community.

One of these was Sauvinet, capitalist and rentier — about whom we shall hear more later. He became the Lafittes' financial backer and we first run across him as the money behind the shop on Royal Street we just mentioned.

Both Jean and Pierre were good mixers and took well with the cafe habitués. Pierre was undoubtedly the hail-fellow-well-met and Jean the polished, polite gentleman whom men cultivated and respected. Jean, though the younger, early assumed the leadership of the two.

More as a matter of business than pleasure — because Jean's restlessness showed the unmistakable signs of an ambitious nature impatient to get ahead — they frequented the public houses, places like the famous Old Absinthe House and La Bourse de Maspero, which the Americans called Maspero's Exchange.

Visitors to New Orleans today are intrigued by "the original Absinthe House bar." Here they see a square of marble with a deep hole worn in its surface by billions of drip, drip, drips of water that, over the years, have gone into the mixing of the powerful green liquor, distilled from wormwood, to make the famous Absinthe Frappe — a drink that found favor in New Orleans.

The Old Absinthe House, as we know it — with its secret floor between the first and second story so that certain guests, presumably the smugglers, might conceal themselves if sudden need arose — is a landmark that conjures up visions of the Creole gentlemen of New Orleans. Here they congregated over a "Cafe Noir" or stronger, talking politics and criticizing those in authority just as we do today — taking it for granted that the Lafittes could be both smugglers and worthy citizens.

Maspero's Exchange was undoubtedly one of the city's favorite male haunts. It was built in 1788 — was a coffee shop at the period we speak of — was the location where the first Chamber of Commerce of New Orleans was organized in 1806 — and was the spot where later the Citizens' Committee of Public Safety welded the city into one fighting unit behind General Jackson.

Yes, it was not only possible but very probable that Maspero's Exchange was one of the regular rendezvous where Jean Lafitte built up his reputation of being a gentleman, a scholar and a bad man to antagonize.

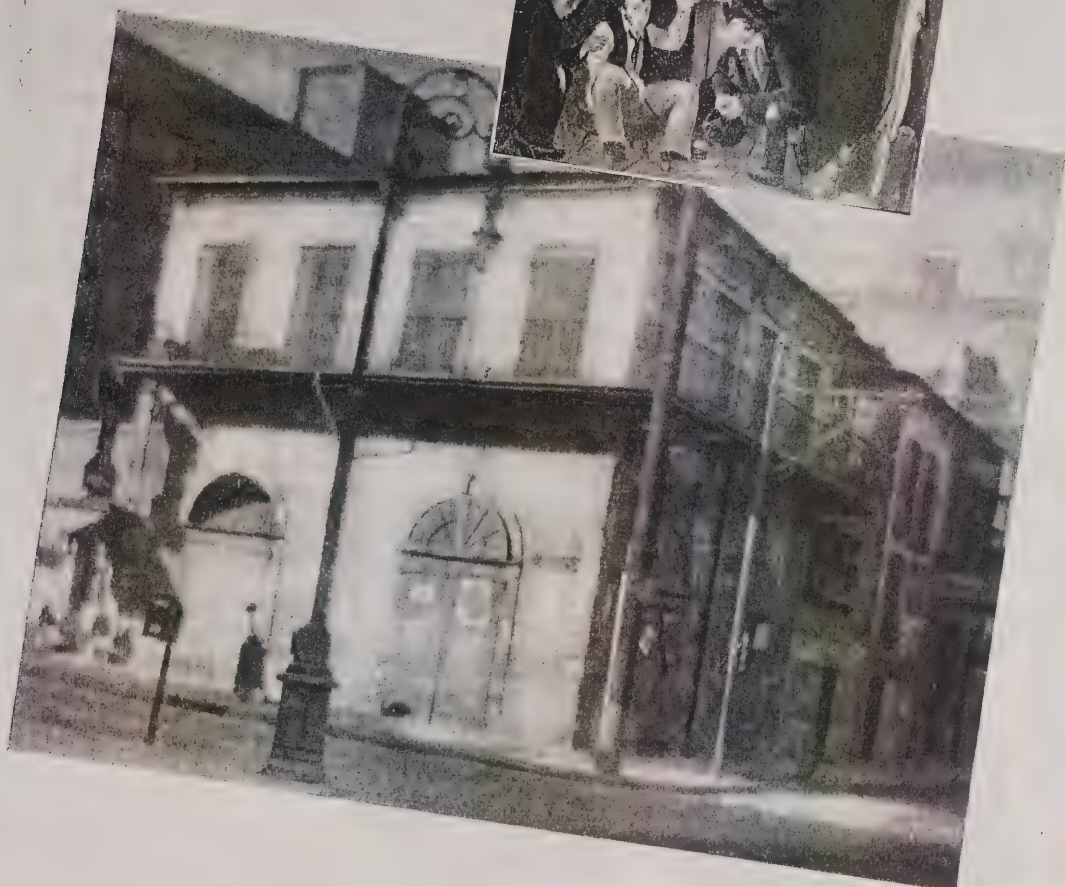
There was one barrier, however, that Jean Lafitte, the social aspirant, could not breach, even though his manners were impeccable. The cautious Creole gentlewomen could not invite this smuggler openly to their homes — but there was no objection on their part if their husbands consorted with the charming Lafitte during the day and told them about his goings on that night.



Above: Maspero's Exchange in New Orleans.

Opposite: The famous Jarvis portrait of the Lafittes, referred to on page 28.

Below: Old Absinthe House in New Orleans.



CLAIBORNE WAS NEITHER A FOOL NOR A WEAKLING

Now, let's look at Governor Claiborne's side of the picture.

He was sent to this new territory by a government fired with American ideals but unfamiliar with Creole traditions. In spite of early opposition, he remained Governor for 13 years. During the last four of those eventful years, when Louisiana had attained statehood, he was elected by the loyal vote of the same people who at first had resented him.

He was admittedly young to be a Governor (only 28 years of age), but he had an excellent legal and political record behind him. At 21, he had helped draw up the Constitution of Tennessee and later was elected to Congress from that State. He came to the virgin Territory of Louisiana direct from the Mississippi Territory where he had served two years as its Governor.

His difficulty was mainly that he, an American, came to head a city that even as late as 1810, six years later, could still muster only 3,000 Americans of a population of 25,000 people predominantly French.

He was the remote representative of a government whose powers to enforce were hundreds of miles away. He had authority but no means to execute it. Plus the fact that as soon as he took office, the U. S. blundered into the bad graces of the French at New Orleans by giving them just the opposite of what "representation of the people" was supposed to mean. Claiborne was appointed by President Jefferson, not elected by the people. The legislative council of thirteen was also appointed, not elected.

Also, New Orleans' previous experience with Americans had been confined mainly to the "river men" than whom there was nothing tougher or rougher. The Creoles probably figured that this new American government planned to ride rough shod over them like the river men took over the seamy side of town when they arrived on their flatboats.

Of course all this political misunderstanding was pretty well adjusted by the end of 1814 when New Orleans stood side by side with Jackson against the British—but for ten years in the meantime Claiborne had a tough struggle and the Lafittes had a field day.

We've left until last the meanest hurdle law and order had to clear under Governor Claiborne. Less than four months after he entered office he issued a proclamation, complying with an Act of Congress, making it illegal in Louisiana to import slaves into the United States from other countries.

This hit hard, as we will explain to you. The plantation owners had just entered an era of expanding prosperity that depended upon slave labor. Thoroughly resentful of the law, they turned to the Lafittes and the smugglers to get them slaves somewhere, somehow.

Place of
Reproduction of original lithograph in New
d'Armes, Cathedral and Presbytere in
Orleans. Inset: A reproduction of a portrait in
oil of Governor Claiborne.



COTTON AND CANE AND SLAVES:
STIR WELL AND LET SIMMER

A few pages back we told you that stupendous events, far beyond the control of the Baratarian smugglers, would force their illegal, but up to this time peaceful pursuit into eventual piracy. Two of these events had taken place almost ten years before the Lafittes landed in New Orleans and the third, this law prohibiting the importation of slaves, occurred about the time they arrived.

In 1793, Eli Whitney invented the saw tooth cotton gin which still gins over 90% of the American cotton crop — and King Cotton came to the South.

In 1795, Etienne de Bore succeeded in making good sugar from Louisiana cane. As a result plantation owners rapidly turned from indigo, which at that time was facing a critical insect blight, to this new crop and the cane sugar industry started in Louisiana.

Cotton and sugar cane! Two new great Southern industries built on slave labor were just swinging into their stride when Claiborne, along with the policies of his new government, tried to enforce a law against the importation of slaves.

Into this breach stepped the willing and well organized smuggling ring. Of all the merchandise the Baratarians ever handled, this new human, black contraband was the most profitable. The net profit varied between \$350 and \$500 a head.

Bootlegging slaves was as great an opportunity for the Baratarians as bootlegging liquor was to the gangs of New York and Chicago and every other American city over a hundred years later. The public approved, paid their price and pleaded for more.

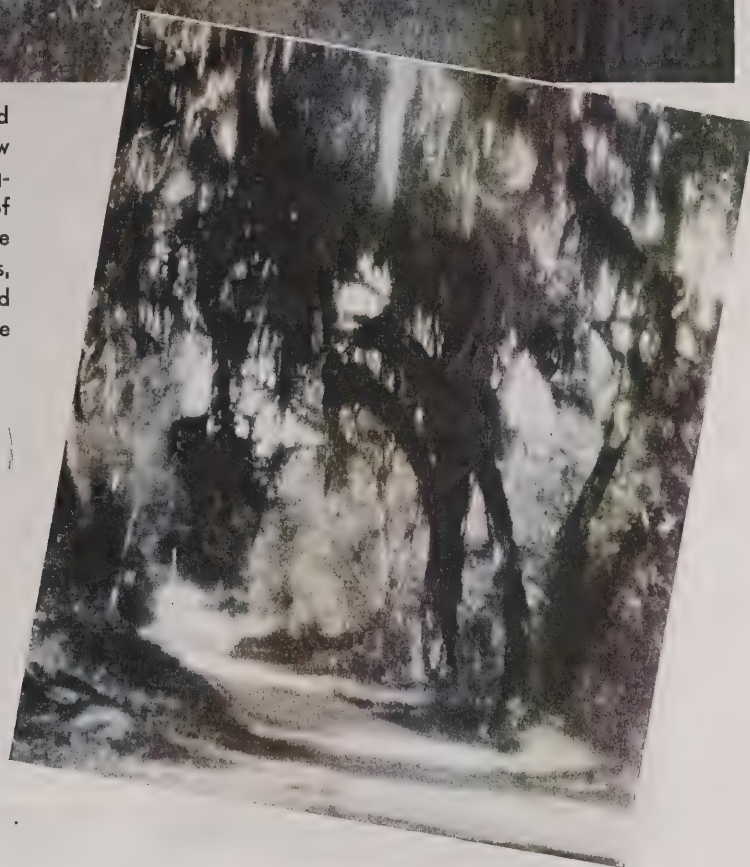
Up to this time the Baratarians were making a fair living smuggling. But when the demand for slaves found them luckily set up for illegal activities, their profits pyramided.

Between 1804 and 1808, Jean Lafitte gained in prominence as the traffic he conducted increased in scope. By 1808, when finally all the states in the Union were closed to the legal importation of slaves, he was an important figure in an organization so thoroughly experienced in the smuggling of slaves, a market so hungry, and a hiding and operating territory so well suited for "outside the law" activities, that he eventually defied the authorities.

The story of the building of that organization is actually the story of Jean Lafitte. So, let's get acquainted with the man himself and the region in which he operated between 1804, when he started merely as a sales representative, and 1810, when he finally became the acknowledged leader of the Baratarians.



To bring their contraband from Grand Terre to New Orleans the Baratarian smugglers used a labyrinth of misty bayous, like the one above; and winding paths, concealed by moss festooned oak and cypress, like the one below.



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THE CONFLICT WE NOW CALL HISTORY

In 1804 Jean Lafitte was about 24 years old and Pierre a few years his senior. Governor Claiborne was only 28. American rule in Louisiana was just a year old and the United States itself had less than 25 years of self government behind it.

This was a young land filled with young men with new, untried ideas. Some were destructive, others were constructive. And, to create confusion, there were strong men trying to build it as well as strong men trying to bleed it.

We now refer to the people of Louisiana as merely Southerners or Americans, but in that particular period they were sharply defined as Creoles and Cajuns; French and Spanish and English; Americans politically leaning toward Spain; Americans merely wanting to be left alone; Americans for, against or indifferent to the Federal Government; Negroes, Indians and a sprinkling of every country then able to span the sea in ships — all part of this new land called Louisiana.

All were bent on forming from this fertile frontier the image of their own dreams. Most of them were honest and thought they were right. Some of them were inherently bad and thought they were clever.

Beginning with the brothers Le Moyne, Iberville and Bienville, who founded it, fine French families sent their blood to this new land. Spain, struggling to hold this vast territory it claimed to have discovered, shipped its finest strains of pure Castilian. Of these first French and Spanish some failed and died. Others survived to establish the Creole culture that gave New Orleans its grace and charm and leading families.

From Canada, driven out by the British, came hardy French peasants who planted their heels hard on the banks of the bayous below New Orleans and stayed to farm, fish and trap. These were the Acadians, whom Longfellow immortalized in "Evangeline." Along Bayous Teche and Lafourche and centered around St. Martinsville their descendants live today, known by the familiar name of "Cajun" which is the slurring effect time and the people have given to the name "Acadian."

There were the Germans whom John Law sent over between 1717 and 1721 to work his vast colonial estate. When the Mississippi Company dissolved they stayed as colonists.

English and New England pioneers found their way into this new land and with their long rifles held remote settlements against Indians and unfriendly whites.

With the Louisiana Purchase, Americans from all the colonies started emigrating to the new territory in an ever increasing stream.

The greater part of these heterogeneous peoples were Catholic. Most of them swore allegiance to foreign Kings. They fought each other, the Indians and the wilderness for a variety of reasons. Some were hunting gold, some hunting a home, some just restless and a lot of them blown here by the winds of chance.



The Land of Contrast

Too many times they have bent with the storm to straighten—these trees on Grand Isle that face the fury of the Gulf.



Back of them, only a few hundred yards, the permanent calm of Spanish Moss and the can't-touch-me gayety of the Yucca flower.



BAYOULAND: STOLEN BY OL' MAN RIVER
AND PRESENTED TO LOUISIANA

As Jean surveyed his new sales territory, way back in 1804 or 1805, he saw a city of about 8,000 people, mostly French. To the North on the river spread the Creole plantations. To the Southwest extended the Cajuns, the trappers and the remote settlements. To the far South were the fishing communities of the Baratarians.

Almost ten thousand square miles of a great unsettled land were his to exploit. The Cajuns were friendly to smuggling. The Creoles were his customers. Mile after mile of unexplored waterways made it impossible for Claiborne's puny police power to trace his activities. On Lafitte's side were two great allies: the wildness of the country and the willingness of the people.

Jean early saw the tremendous possibilities for expanding the illegal business practiced by the Baratarians. In the first few years, when he was merely an agent for them, he made innumerable trips to Grand Terre and Grand Isle, acquainting himself with the many tricky routes, offering suggestions for speeding up deliveries, building up sales and enlarging their area of operations.

In those days the quickest and often the only possible highway was the water—either the river or the bayous. There is an old saying that you can go anywhere from a Louisiana bayou.

You traveled, of course, by pirogue, which was the Indian canoe of the lower Mississippi country. Most people think of Indians as using birch bark canoes, but not down here. These Bayougoulas and Mongoulachas cut out or burned out the trunks of cottonwoods and shaped the ends.

It was the French traders who called them pirogues and who improved on the original idea by felling cypress trees nearly fifty feet long and cutting out huge models that would carry from twenty to thirty men or several tons of freight. Yes, you could go anywhere and carry about anything in a pirogue on a Louisiana bayou.

Jean's habit was to cross the river and make a short land trip of a few miles to the head of Bayou Coquille where it flowed into Bayou des Familles, to map out one of a dozen possible routes. There he, and probably several others, would start their long paddle through the water wilderness of The Land of Lafitte.

Hour after hour they paddled, wending and winding. Sometimes the over-hanging oaks would blot out the blazing sun. Cypress knees sticking up, as though the trees were squatting in the water to keep cool, demanded intricate maneuvering. Willows and palmettos screened and decorated the labyrinthian route. The unending silence was broken only by the sprag of the paddle.

Alligators splashed sluggishly as the pirogue approached and water moccasins slyly evaded the slap of the paddle. Curious gray-blue herons and snowy egrets watched the interlopers from a safe distance and hundreds of muskrats scurried away. Occasionally Jean and his companions would hear the unmistakable sounds of a startled black bear or deer making a getaway.



THE DELICATE DISTINCTION BETWEEN A PRIVATEER AND A PIRATE

Every now and then Jean and his companions would pass patches of land higher than the surrounding country and covered with live oaks. These were Indian shell mounds and ancient refuse heaps, man's only trademark on a million acres of Nature's domain.

Through Lake Salvador, on to Little Lake and through its confusing channels (a man could be lost for days in these waterways if he didn't know the route) Jean finally comes out into Hackberry Bay where a bigger boat meets the pirogue at a secret rendezvous.

Then they sail across Barataria Bay, with its "trembling prairies" or salt marshes along its shores; come within sight of an island covered with pelicans standing calmly or gliding gracefully; move through hundreds of porpoise playing tag, the fastest things in water; steer through a fleet of fishing boats tied to a rude wharf — up to Grand Terre, two sleeps from New Orleans.

We introduced you to the Baratarians very briefly before. This time you can look around a bit while Jean is talking business.

Yes, the Baratarians are expert fishermen. And, it is doubtful they would ever have considered smuggling if chance had not placed their fishing grounds right at the one place on the Gulf Coast where everything is in favor of the fox and everything against the hounds.

These Baratarians were not pirates — not yet. The looting and killing were done by the privateers, which is another name for legalized piracy — just as war is legalized murder.

At that time there were few countries not at war with some other country. Private owners manned their own armed vessels with bloodthirsty, adventurous crews and, as long as they captured and confiscated only vessels of the nation or nations with whom their own country was at war, they were classified as privateers. They operated legally with "letters of marque" which were a sort of international robbing and killing license.

Of course, hot with the blood lust, those privateers often failed to discriminate too carefully and grievances were registered which never seemed to help the dead victims of mistaken identity.

After pillaging and burning merchant ships in the Caribbean or capturing slavers, which were preferred prey, the privateers liked to scurry for Grand Terre and Grand Isle. Here they could sneak through tricky Barataria Pass, like a fox into its hole, and be safe from the sight of enemy men-of-war.

Grand Terre and Grand Isle are two slender islands, each about eight miles long and a mile or so wide. Barataria Pass was deep enough and wide enough, if the ship's captain knew the channel, for the privateers' ships to come into eighteen mile long Barataria Bay for protection. Trees concealed even their high masts from the Gulf and the Bay itself protected them from Gulf storms.



Above is tricky Barataria Pass which, at spots, reaches a depth of 165 feet. It requires a skillful pilot to wend his way into Barataria Bay even today. Below is the tip of Grand Isle facing Grand Terre where today, as in Lafitte's time, there is a fishermen's landing. But, we assure you, it's a legitimate business today — not a front for smuggling.



JEAN LAFITTE SHOWS SIGNS OF LEADERSHIP

The privateers also liked these island retreats because New Orleans was a never failing market for whatever goods they brought, human or otherwise. Besides, while the Baratarian smuggler-fishermen turned their booty into cash, the privateers themselves could remain safely inside Barataria Bay, gorging on stolen foods and wines until they became saturated and bored. Then away again for another prize!

A little while ago we left Jean talking to the Baratarians. As we now watch him moving among them — explaining, arguing, advising — we begin to see why this slim, young adventurer is fast becoming an influence among these simple men who prefer smuggling to seining.

Only one portrait of Jean Lafitte has come down through history — and that is a distorted likeness. It is the painting by the artist Jarvis, who lived in New Orleans at that time. Jarvis was the nephew of John Wesley, founder of Methodism, but his own inclinations tended more toward boon companions. His painting (shown on page 17) portrays Jean as a “bon vivant” drinking with Pierre and Dominique You, who is to join him later in our story. Jean is shown singing, which prevents any accurate conception of his features.

We know that he was tall, about six feet — slim and graceful as a rapier. He was dark and handsome, with features classic and delicate. His manners were those of the courtier. We are led to believe that he flattered women, was greatly admired by them, but no tales of Lafitte connect him with them in romantic entanglements. He was, by all accounts, too intent upon carving a career for himself to dilly-dally with either affairs of the drawing room or boudoir.

He was never known to brawl or quarrel. Although his sword wrist was supple and expert, his cool head never embroiled him in a situation from which his ready blade would have to extricate him.

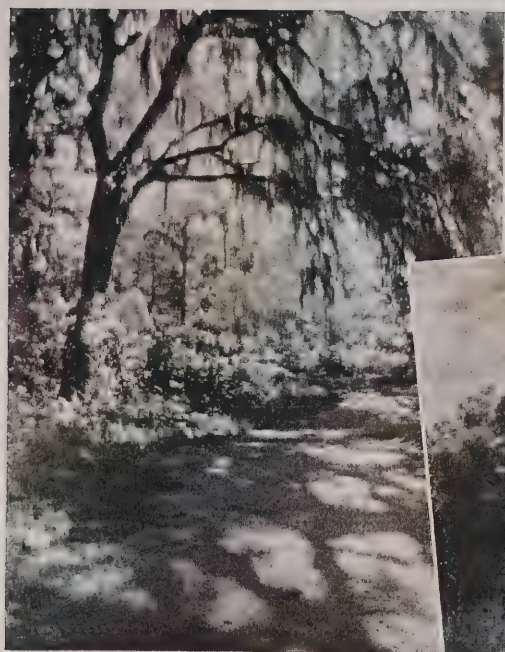
He was a gentleman who took a job with a band of uneducated, unpolished and unorganized fishermen turned smugglers. He spoke French and Spanish fluently and English well. He was familiar with the methods of business, of politics and, it was rumored, of privateering itself before he came to New Orleans. Soon his qualities of leadership, education and brilliant brain for strategy made his voice carry weight with the simple Baratarians who were getting a little over their heads in this big business of dealing in slaves.

Most of the smugglers could neither read nor write. Few of them could talk with ease or poise to the Creole plantation owners who were their best customers. They needed a gentleman in their midst — a man whom the aristocrats would respect — a man who could talk Parisian French or the Baratarian patois with equal proficiency.

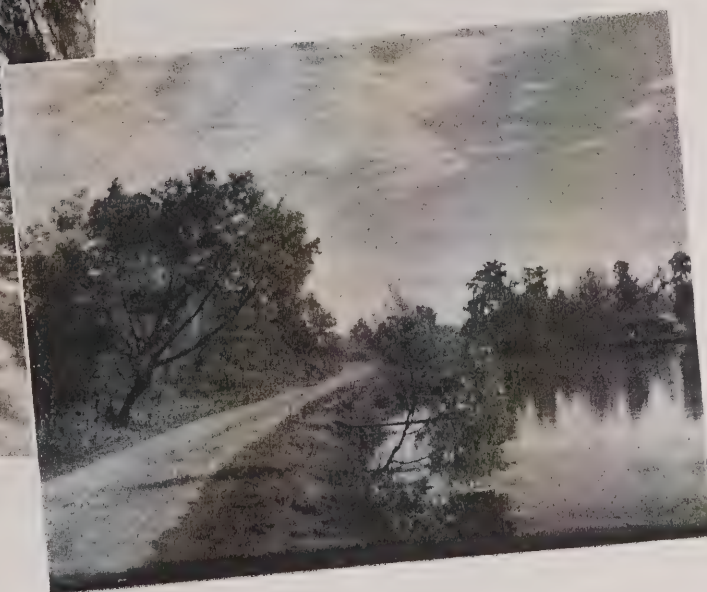
Gradually his conferences with the Baratarians increased until eventually he handled more and more the organization end at Barataria Bay while Pierre concentrated more and more on the city business and the Royal Street shop.



Beauty and The Baratarians



Why these people, living in a land so lovely,
would endanger their island paradise by
meddling in smuggling and piracy we'll
never know.



JEAN TAKES THE NEXT STEP: PRIVATEERING

From this point on, Pierre recedes into the background and Jean becomes a greater thorn in Claiborne's side than ever. There is, however, a very definite reason why the two brothers can no longer divide authority and responsibility.

Pierre is not only married and has a family, but he has just suffered a stroke, brought on undoubtedly by his uncontrolled love for good food and the red, red wine. He recovers but not with his former vigor. In fact, he is left slightly cross-eyed. So Pierre, unable to stand the rigors of repeated trips to Grand Terre, stays in New Orleans to operate the shop on Royal and, incidentally, to protect Jean's interests at the end where the law lurks.

Things are happening so rapidly in the smuggling business that Jean, for a while, is here, there, and everywhere. He is now accepted as the most important figure in smuggling and although the socially correct Creole wives cannot invite him to their homes, their husbands are seen with him in public places. Jean becomes a patron of the Opera. He is seen at the famous Quadroon Balls.

The demand for slaves constantly exceeded the supply. In 1803, when Claiborne arrived at New Orleans, there were nearly as many slaves in the State of New York as in all of Louisiana. But by 1810, the period which we are now discussing, Louisiana had more than twice as many as New York. What was happening in Louisiana was taking place throughout the whole South. Cotton was King and loudly demanding slaves. Lafitte was trying his best to oblige.

It was about this time, too, that Jean decided to expand personally; to become not only an agent for other privateers, but a privateer himself. He would get his own boat (he had the money now); would sail to Cartagena, where he could get a letter of marque and would collect profits both in the producing and selling ends.

Jean had a personal reason for picking Cartagena. That was the seaport town of the former Spanish province of Colombia that had declared its independence and was now at war with Spain. A letter of marque from Cartagena would permit Jean to attack and confiscate Spanish ships, which was exactly the way he wanted it.

Although we know nothing of the Lafittes previous to their arrival in New Orleans, Jean told many conflicting stories about himself. He was a good raconteur and we are inclined to believe he regaled his friends with tall tales to entertain them. To believe the stories he told of himself regarding his past before he landed here, we would have to overlook the fact that he could not have crammed it all into a youthful 24 years. Frankly, we think Jean never intended people to believe. It was his way of diverting them from the truth, whatever it was.



It doesn't take a vivid imagination to live again in The Land of Lafitte. A trip to the Barataria country will do it—seeing an ox-team slowly emerge from a woodland lane or suddenly discovering an old outdoor oven. You'll catch yourself turning toward the Gulf, expectantly looking for a three-master flying the Jolly Roger.



FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE EARTH
GATHER CURIOUS CORSAIRS

In one thing, Jean was emphatic and undeniably sincere. He hated Spain. He is quoted as saying, "As long as I live I am at war with Spain."

So, from both a personal and profit standpoint, Jean decided to search for Spanish prizes with his own ship. Legend tells us that he went to Cartagena, returned with the required letter of marque and also a Spanish prize to pay the expenses of the trip. But legend never says a word about Jean Lafitte sailing again during this period of his career. His ship or ships later went out, under his orders, but he remained on land, tending to the mounting responsibilities of managing a community of lawless men.

His status as a privateer now gave him added importance and gradually he became the acknowledged head of these freebooters. For several years he had been carefully organizing the Baratarians and the privateers, who were flocking to Grand Terre in great numbers, into a centralized trust or smugglers' syndicate. In this way he controlled prices and prevented the friction of opposing factions. It was a tribute to his genius for handling men that he was able to exercise a restraining influence over hundreds of mass murderers that feared neither God nor man. They called him "bos" or leader. Perhaps that's where the modern word "boss" originated.

So thoroughly was his reputation now established that famous freelances in freebooting came to join his gang. They had heard that a good privateer could make money under Lafitte.

One of these was Dominique You, born in Santo Domingo in the town of Port-au-Prince and a sea-rover since boyhood. He was an expert artillerist under Napoleon but had been privateering on his own account for several years. When he heard of Lafitte's community of corsairs he decided to visit New Orleans and see for himself.

Dominique You and Lafitte met. Lafitte was tall and aristocratic and the exact opposite of what a potential pirate should look like. But Dominique You was the story book ideal. He was a short, broad shouldered man with fiery black eyes and a vicious white scar running from his temple to his chin, adding a fierce leer to his naturally savage face. Dominique You was as tough as they come, but somehow he and Lafitte of the slender, delicate hands clicked on sight.

Dominique You's personality belied his fierce countenance. Actually he was exceptionally good natured with a great love for practical jokes, even on himself. His fits of anger were rare but usually justified. His bravery was exceptional even among these fearless men. Although he went through life with a laugh his vessel soon became one of the most dangerous privateers in the Caribbean.

A year later Dominique You was Lafitte's most trusted lieutenant — loyal and reliable and capable. The whole world later heard of this swarthy cannoneer at the Battle of New Orleans.

The famous meeting of Dominique You and Jean
at the Lafitte blacksmith shop.



INTRODUCING "NEZ COUPE" OR "SHORT NOSE"

Others came to join Lafitte. There was Rene Beluche, an artillerist like Dominique You, who also turned into a trusted lieutenant and who, after the famous pardon following the Battle of New Orleans, became a commodore in the Venezuelan Navy.

There was surly Gambi, the Italian, who later challenged Jean Lafitte's authority and came out second best; and Louis Chighizola, another Italian, who was known as "Nez Coupe" or "Short Nose" because his olfactory organ had been shorn flush with his face in some former sea battle.

There is a legend on Grand Isle to this day built around Louis Chighizola or "Nez Coupe." In the yard at the side of the old Chighizola house still stands a tree in which, long ago, a hole was bored by a person or persons unknown. The legend says this was the pirates' secret post office — the place on Grand Isle where messages were left by and for Jean Lafitte.

We do know that "Nez Coupe" remained on Grand Isle after the gang was broken up and became a quiet man of peace — fishing and farming and lazin' in the sun.

There is another story associated with this same Louis Chighizola, who was so closely associated with Jean Lafitte for many years.

Across the center of Grand Isle today is a row of live oaks that strategically stands between the Gulf storms and the homes on the island. The trees are too evenly spaced to have grown naturally. "Nez Coupe" is credited with planting them.

In the great storm of 1893 nearly one thousand people on neighboring Chênrière Caminada, which is part of the mainland just a half mile away on the same expanse of coast, were killed by the wind and the ensuing tidal wave. No such row of oaks protected Chênrière Caminada. It was almost bare of trees and, as a result, the wind and water expended the full force of their fury on the fragile buildings that housed the inhabitants.

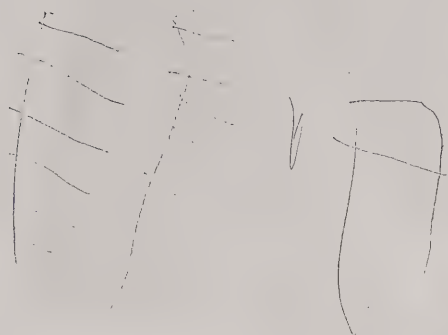
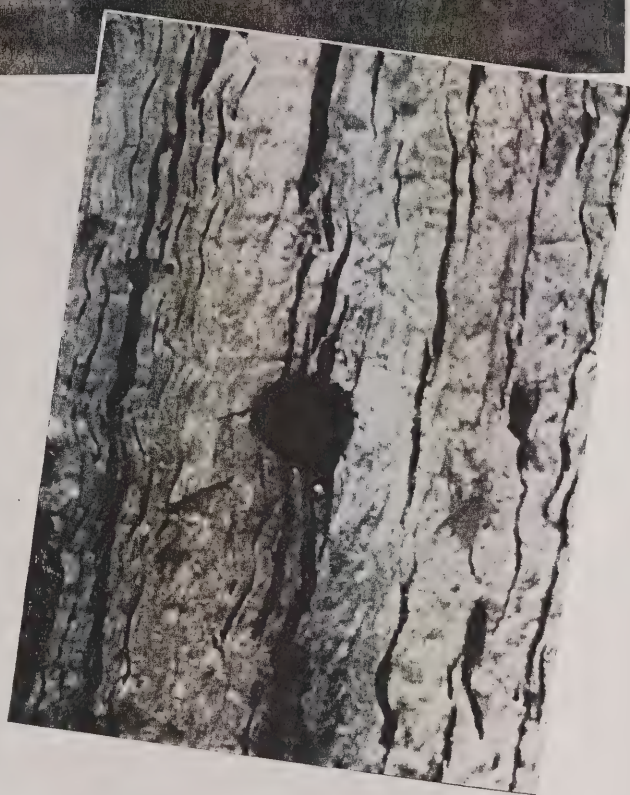
On Grand Isle the "Nez Coupe" oaks broke the back of the hurricane and only seven negroes were killed — no whites.

Strange is the working of Destiny! Nearly eighty years later, the trees planted by a privateer were responsible for the saving of the lives of a whole community, perhaps several hundred souls. The inscrutable balancing of the ledger!

In the hundred and forty years since Chighizola, The Land of Lafitte has experienced not more than three violent hurricanes. All of those impotently spent their strength on the trees of Grand Isle, breaking against their protecting branches like assaulting troops against impregnable barbed wire. Contrary to the belief of many people, destructive storms are rare. Generation after generation has slept safely next to the Gulf on this beautiful, exposed island.



Falling into ruin is this home of "Nez Coupe" on Grand Isle; but resisting the ravages of time is the old oak in its yard in which the old timers say Lafitte left and received secret messages. Visitors today find the hole there, which proves nothing. But the legend persists.



LAFITTE'S PRIVATEERS ELIMINATE THE MIDDLE MAN

For ten years Lady Luck rode on Lafitte's shoulder. Everything — from 1804 to 1814 — seemed to promote the prosperity of his colony.

Right at the very beginning of his career the sudden demand for smuggled slaves had pushed his activities rapidly into the big money bracket. It helped greatly, too, that Claiborne was as helpless as a muzzled bulldog during those ten years, simply because public sentiment was against him and he lacked the adequate military or police power to enforce his edicts.

In the early days Lafitte's Baratarians smugglers had bought their slaves from the Cuban slave traders. But as the demand grew greater and greater, Jean's luck, ably assisted by the British Navy, sent him hordes of privateers to join his colony. From then on Lafitte's privateers merely cruised beyond the Cuban coasts, intercepted the slave ships as they came from Africa and casually eliminated the expense of buying their black cargo from the Cuban dealers.

Probably we'd better explain what we mean by "Jean's luck ably assisted by the British Navy."

Around the turn of the century the European wars had nurtured a growing group of privateers of every known nationality. Most of them operated under French "letters of marque" and Spanish commerce was their legitimate prey. Many, of course, made occasional side forays into piracy.

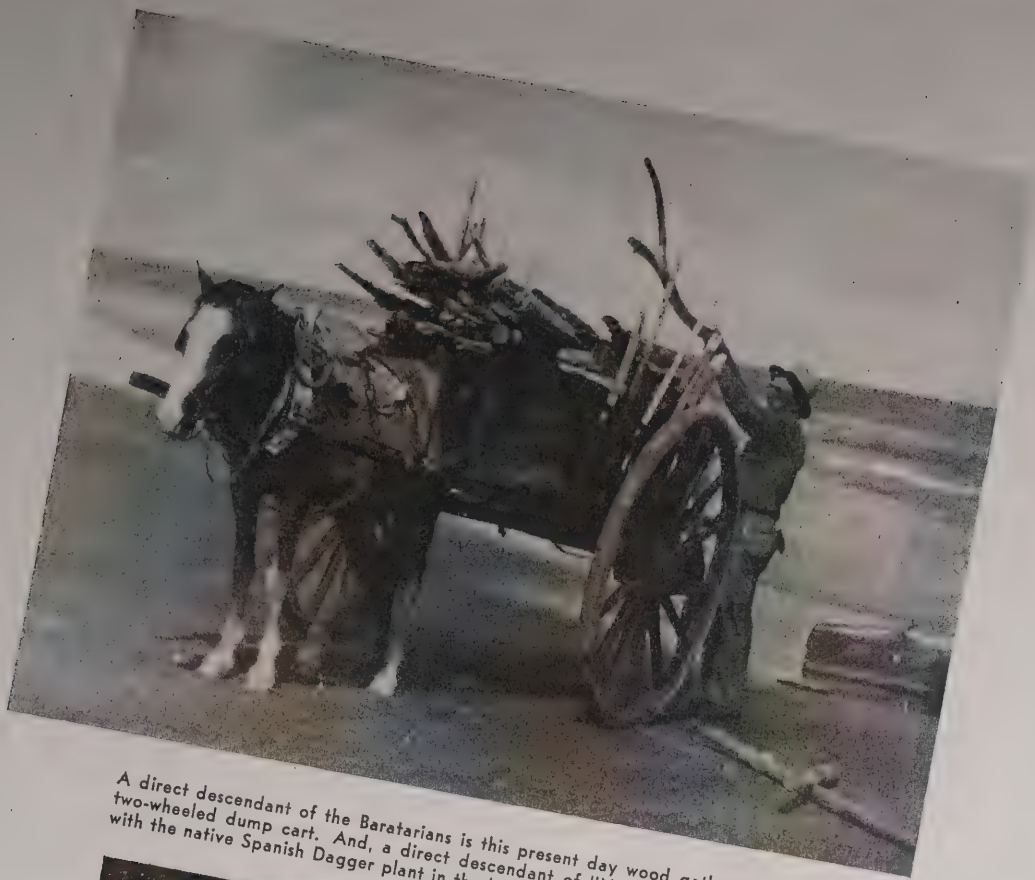
The French privateers had their headquarters at Guadaloupe and Martinique and it disturbed their activities mightily when these islands were captured by the British in 1806. In fact it disturbed them so greatly that by 1810 they had all been driven out and had to hunt a new base of operations.

Strange how it all worked out. Lafitte, at that time, needed those privateers to help fill his orders for slaves and contraband. The privateers, on the other hand, needed Lafitte's Baratarian base. A privateer's dream, those islands and that protected bay!

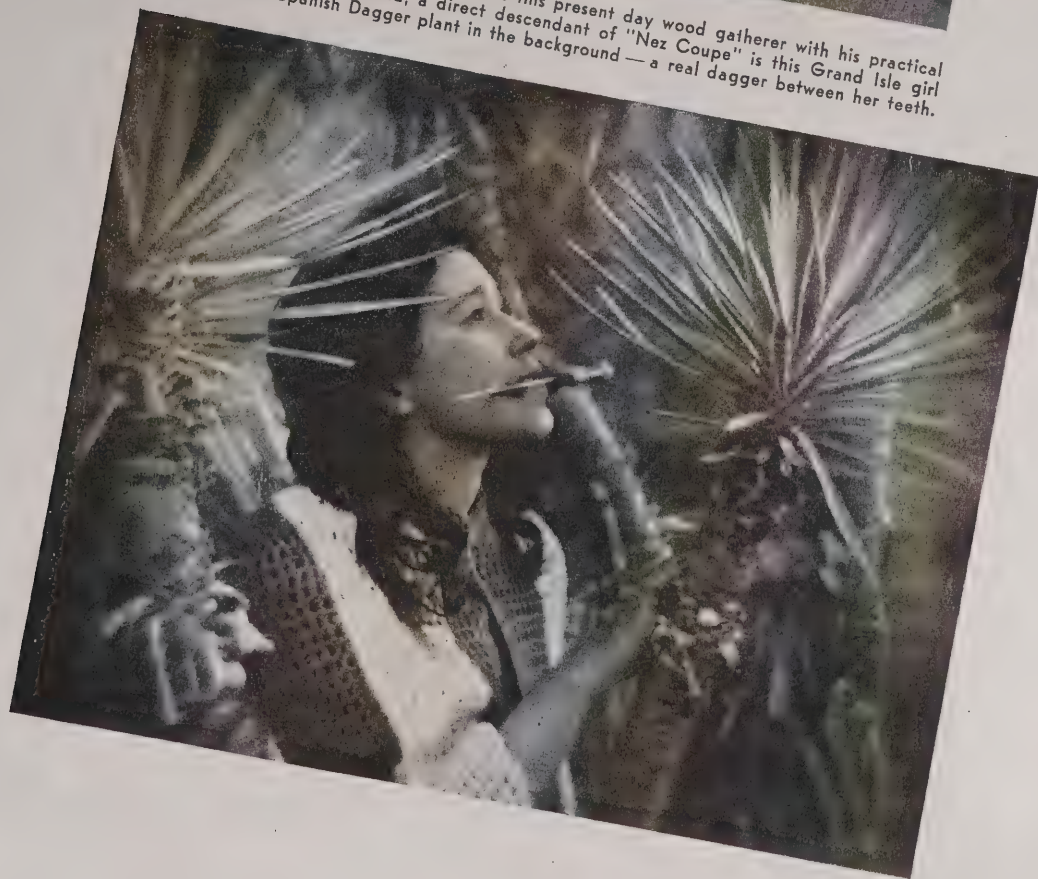
To make it all cozy for everyone, just at this psychological time Colombia declared herself free from Spain. Cartagena, her seaport, offered letters of marque to anyone who would annoy Spanish shipping. With French letters of marque very unpopular, since the British were nosing around the Caribbean, the privateers without a qualm hauled down the French colors, hoisted the flag of Cartagena and started out again, presumably after Spanish shipping — this time under Lafitte's general orders and Cartagena's sponsorship.

The warehouses at Grand Terre began to bulge with accumulated contraband. From the crowded slave barracoons at night came the ceaseless sounds of African sorrow. There was always a prize in the Bay, waiting to be unloaded. Convoys made their way up the bayous, slipping into New Orleans with merchandise and delivering slaves to plantations.

Greater and greater grew the power and profits of the Baratarians.



A direct descendant of the Baratarians is this present day wood gatherer with his practical two-wheeled dump cart. And, a direct descendant of "Nez Coupe" is this Grand Isle girl with the native Spanish Dagger plant in the background — a real dagger between her teeth.



BELIEVE IT OR NOT — LAFITTE NEVER
WANTED TO BECOME A PIRATE

To the casual reader of romantic fiction, Jean Lafitte leaped from the pages of history a full fledged buccaneer, replete with smoking pistols and life-and-death authority over a dozen ships and their crews.

But to the student of history, Jean's progress into piracy was a slow process that covered at least eight years. Piracy was the one thing in which he did not want to be involved. Primarily Jean was a business man and a competent leader. He always carefully weighed chances. Privateering was legal. Smuggling although illegal was popular with the people. But piracy — that would be suicide!

He reasoned — and correctly — that smuggling was a local crime coming under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Customs Authorities stationed in Louisiana and, since Claiborne's administration was practically without teeth, his profitable business could continue indefinitely. But piracy would bring him and his enterprises into conflict with the U. S. Navy. No, from a purely practical standpoint, Jean was against it.

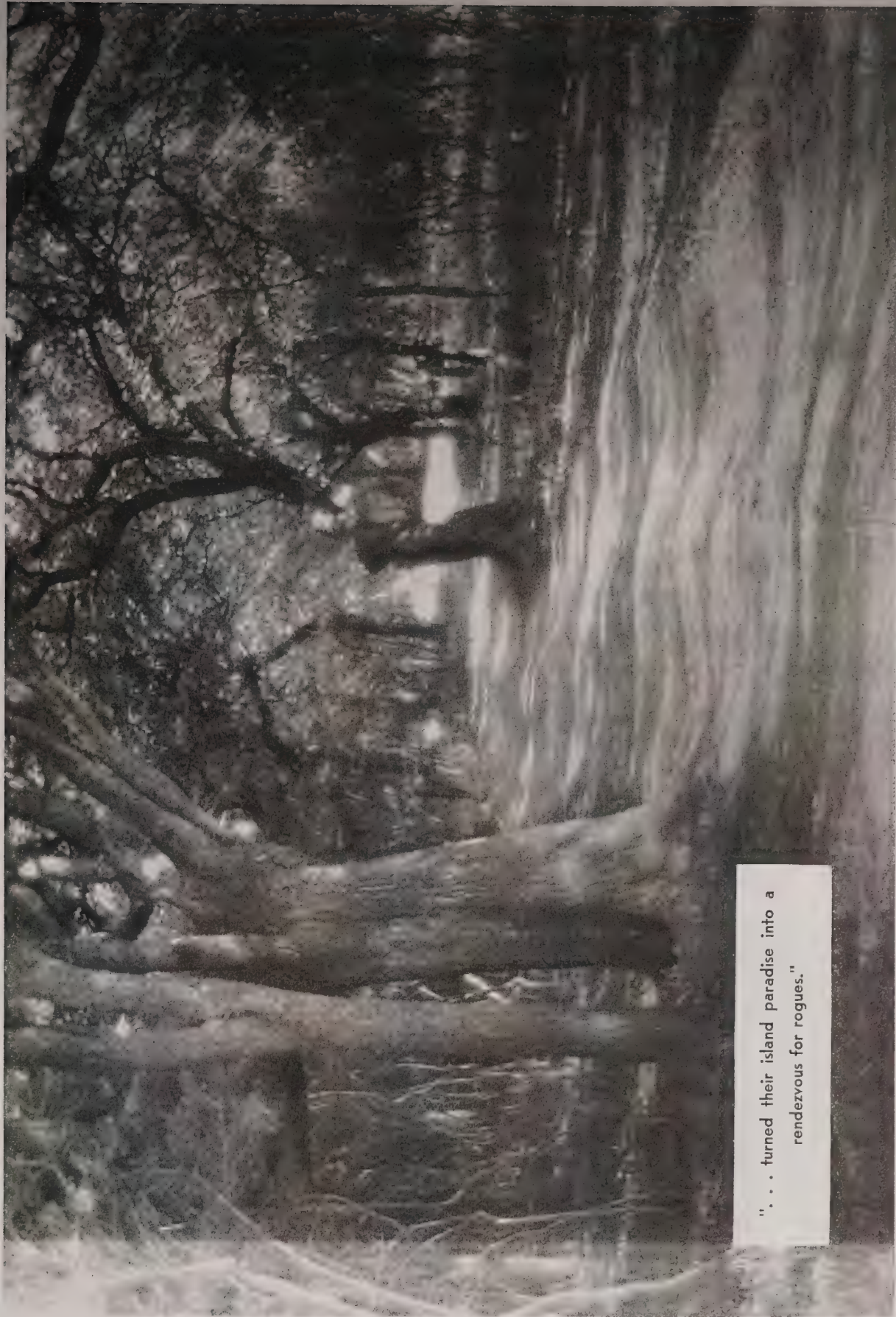
Never, during Jean Lafitte's career with the Baratarians (historically speaking) do we run across any thrilling accounts of him leaping to the deck of a luckless merchantman, cutlass in teeth, at the head of his screaming, cursing crew.

In fact, his famous conflict with Gambi and his men, about which we will tell you later, developed because of his strict orders that piracy would not be tolerated.

We must remember, however, that by the time Jean had attained unquestioned leadership, close to a thousand men made Barataria their headquarters. Privateers, so called, were coming and going constantly. Jean made no pretense of controlling their morals or their personal actions. Only at Barataria and in the distribution of their loot was Jean dictator. Only his own ships could he actually control on the high seas. So many things occurred that he could not prohibit, and so many crimes were committed that he could not prevent or prove, that the slow and steady drift into outright piracy was inevitable.

It was a strange mixture at Barataria in 1810. There were the original Baratarian fishermen who, tempted by the easy profits in smuggling, had turned their fishing and hunting paradise into a rendezvous for rogues.

Young hotheads from New Orleans and simple, hardy Acadians from the bayous joined the colony, attracted by adventure and Jean Lafitte's reputation. And the privateers — men whose pasts were obscured in blood — came from every quarter of the globe. Many were French, Italian, Spanish, Portugese, Dutch and even New England Yankees — all outlaws from their own lands. Some were refugees from Santo Domingo, Guadaloupe and Martinique. All were desperate and deadly. All were there for easy money. Robbery was their chosen profession!



"... turned their island paradise into a rendezvous for rogues."

SMUGGLERS, ALIAS PRIVATEERS, ALIAS PIRATES

Ordinarily we do not associate wives and children with pirates but there were many families and homes at Grand Terre and Grand Isle.

For fifty years before Lafitte organized the Baratarians into a smugglers' syndicate these fishermen had been living in peace and security. Women had reared children. Those children had grown up, married and raised children of their own. They laughed, danced and were happy as all simple folk are.

The women, when young, were beautiful, dark and affectionate. When they found their future husbands they lived submissive lives, having little thought beyond their men and their children.

The boys were strong, virile, hotblooded sons of the sea and soil with no fear in their souls but plenty of lust for adventure. They were excellent smuggler material and by their very nature, potential pirates.

These people lived in homes like the one facing this page. Each palmetto thatched cottage was snugly hidden behind its thicket of shrubs and oleander, not for concealment but for protection against the capricious storms of the Gulf. A warm, sweet breeze, filled with the scent of flowers, may blow all day, kissing the island like an affectionate girl. But suddenly there is no breeze. A blanket of blistering heat descends. Nothing stirs. The island is tense and waiting.

It is then we understand why all the windows in these one and two room homes are protected with heavy wooden shutters. The sun disappears and a whining wind comes in from the Gulf. Lightning rends the heavens as a passionate tropical storm lashes at the beauty of Barataria with all the fury of a frustrated suitor, snarling among the oaks and bending the tall palms.

Then, just as quickly, the storm abates. The sun comes out again. The gentle breeze warily returns and the island gleams like a princess bedecked with diamonds.

The shutters are opened, the children run out to play, the men expertly scan the sky and the women grumble because a favorite flower has been leveled to the ground.

Yes, it was a strange mixture at Barataria by 1810. Women trying to raise normal families — simple fishermen torn between their honest love for fishing and their lust for ill-gotten gains — privateers, pirates, corsairs (a rogue by any other name is just as evil), bedeviled by their past and blinded by their greed — and Jean Lafitte, aristocrat and erstwhile gentleman, more of a soldier of fortune than a killer, trying to lead but being himself pushed toward disaster.



THE TALE OF THE THIMBLE AND THE GOLD DOUBLOONS THAT MYSTERIOUSLY TARNISHED

Many tales have come down to us from the period when Barataria was in its heyday and the privateers were at the peak of their prosperity. Some, like the tale of the thimble, can never be proven. The participants themselves are long gone and they left no written records. But their descendants, still living on Grand Isle, have passed on these stories as they heard them from the lips of their grandparents.

One night, as the tale of the thimble is still recounted on Grand Isle, the loot of a Spanish prize was being divided. Lafitte was there, as were the leaders of the vessels which had made the capture.

The apportioning of the spoils was, to these freebooters, a very serious business. There were definite rules. No man was to get more than his share and every man's portion, from the captain down, had been definitely agreed upon before the ship ever sailed.

The basic unit of measurement was "one part," which was the crew member's share. So many parts were allotted to the captain and other officers. A certain number of parts were set aside as bonuses for injuries, behavior in action, etc. So many parts were taken by the owner of the vessel. It is interesting to note how well these outlaws of the sea treated their cook. He received one and one-half parts, while the ordinary seaman, who did the fighting, was considered worth only one.

After everything had been evenly divided according to the rules of privateering, there were two Spanish gold doubloons left. To prevent bickering among the men present, Lafitte gallantly offered them to Chighizola's wife who, the legend also tells us, was a beautiful Spanish woman.

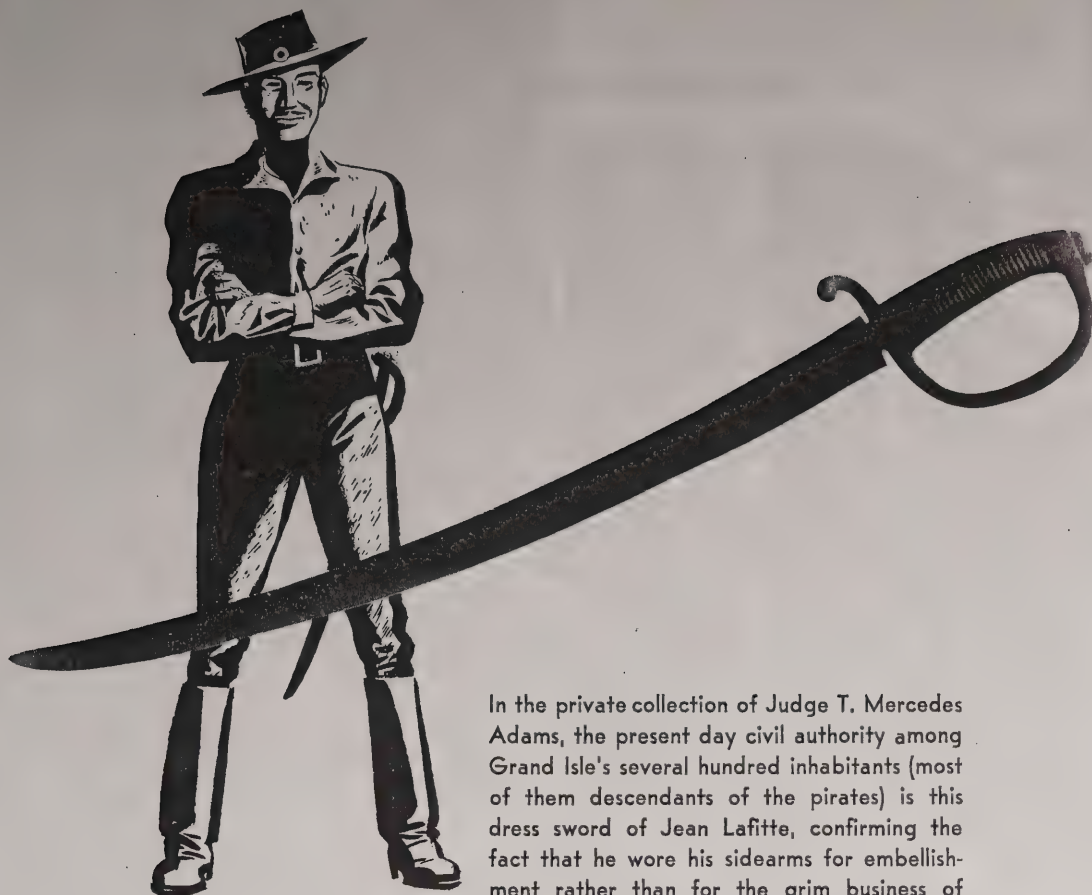
However, not trusting "Nez Coupe," whose flair for gambling might tempt him to later confiscate the coins himself, Jean ordered one of his men to hammer the gold doubloons into a thimble. This gold thimble still exists.

Also, here is a supporting story which seems to justify Jean Lafitte's distrust of "Nez Coupe's" gambling weakness. It seems that after the pirate days were over and the Chighizolas were respected dwellers on Grand Isle, "Nez Coupe" still retained some gold coins from his lush days. These were concealed in the bed tick, a fact of which his wife was well aware. She, like all good spouses, probably considered it as set aside for a rainy day.

But "Nez Coupe" loved the clink of the chips. Periodically, his losses needing recouping, he would surreptitiously withdraw a few gold coins from the tick, replace them with brass pieces of the same size and thus continued his gambling without jeopardizing his domestic felicity.

However, one day Madam Chighizola, renewing the tick or something of that nature which housewives do, removed the coins and was sad to discover that their precious cache of gold had tarnished — a fact which she bemoaned to "Nez Coupe" that night.

There the story ends. None of the descendants seem to know whether she ever learned that gold will not tarnish and with it discovered her husband's duplicity. We only know that "Nez Coupe" was a smooth rascal.



In the private collection of Judge T. Mercedes Adams, the present day civil authority among Grand Isle's several hundred inhabitants (most of them descendants of the pirates) is this dress sword of Jean Lafitte, confirming the fact that he wore his sidearms for embellishment rather than for the grim business of killing.

Also, in Judge Adam's private collection, is this gold thimble referred to on the opposite page, presented to her by a daughter of "Nez Coupe."



AN EVENING WITH THE PIRATES

There is still another legend which deserves retelling and which seems to prove that one of the secrets of Jean's power over his men was his sense of fair play.

This story comes down through the Rigaud family which, before the Lafittes ever came to America, owned the whole of Grand Isle. Just how far the Rigauds were involved with Lafitte's illegal activities is a matter of pure conjecture. The Rigaud plantation on Grand Isle and the Lafitte domain just across the Pass on Grand Terre were too close to be unfamiliar with each other's business. It will never be known just how cooperative the Rigauds were with their neighbor, Lafitte. All we know is that they were friendly.

The story concerns Francois Rigaud and his daughter, Marie.

Francois was visiting Grand Terre, either watching or participating in the privateers' perpetual gambling. One of those very tense situations had arisen where all the money was on the table and the cut of a card would throw the pot (equivalent perhaps to the loot of a whole voyage) to one man. That one man was either Jean Lafitte or a visiting privateer who is only identified in the story as wearing gold earrings. A loud argument was in progress because Jean had offered to let someone else cut the cards for him. Naturally, none of these honest gentry trusted each other. So, Francois Rigaud offered a solution. He would row back home and get his little girl, Marie. No one could possibly accuse a child of cheating.

The pirates — pardon me, privateers — looked at each other through liquor-dimmed eyes. No — even an honest freebooter could see that. "Go get Marie!" ordered Lafitte. So Francois left on his errand to prevent the shedding of good buccaneer blood.

Marie was frightened, having been awakened from a deep sleep. Her mother was furious. But Rigaud said he knew his pals — she'd be perfectly safe.

Marie held desperately to her father's hand as she entered the smoke filled room. Rows of sweaty, bearded faces leered at her from the shadows cast by sputtering candles. She was spoken to by the tall gentleman standing at the card table with a pistol in his hand. Trembling like a leaf she lifted some cards from the deck as she was ordered and turned over the ten of spades.

It won for Jean and he laughed as he raked in the pile of coins. The curses of the man with the gold earrings made the candles flicker.

Then Jean leaned over Marie and placed in her lucky hand a Spanish piece worth twenty dollars. It was partly his rare smile, which he displayed seldom, as much as the gold coin that helped dry her tears. Go to Grand Isle today and you'll find a Rigaud to tell you this story.

A color photograph of an elderly woman, Theresa Rigaud, standing on a wide wooden staircase that leads up to a porch. She is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved button-down shirt and dark trousers. The porch has a wooden railing with vertical balusters. The building is made of wood and has a rustic appearance. The background shows some trees and a clear sky. The overall tone of the photo is warm and slightly aged.

Theresa Rigaud, the present day head of the Rigauds, still lives on Grand Isle, still speaks pure Parisian French and, although in her eighties, still loves to talk of the days of Lafitte.

NO HOST SO CHARMING, INSISTED HIS GUESTS,
COULD BE A PIRATE

By 1811, when Dominique You and the other lieutenants had joined him and when his responsibilities at Barataria far exceeded his obligations at New Orleans, Jean had completed for himself a very comfortable home at Grand Terre.

This Lafitte domicile, in contrast to the palmetto thatched houses of the Baratarians and privateers that surrounded it, was a low one-story house constructed of brick and coated on the outside with a mixture of pulverized oyster shell and plaster. The windows were iron-barred and facing the sea was a wide veranda, on which Jean liked to lounge in the afternoons in his favorite red hammock.

Many things would be clarified if we could know what Jean thought as he used those siestas to plan and dream. Was he the disgraced or exiled son of some aristocratic French family, never able to go home again? Was he merely an ambitious youth of humble origin pulling himself up by his own bootstraps? Was he a victim of circumstances or would he have gravitated to men like those lying under the trees, some sleeping off last night's debauchery, no matter where he had landed or lived? Jean's whole life was a paradox—even his home on Grand Terre.

It was situated on an elevation which commanded the entire island as well as a splendid view of the Gulf. Between the house and the beach were the slave barracoon and the warehouse for goods waiting to be moved up the bayous to market, as shown on the opposite page.

No need to tell you that inside Jean's house was the pick of many sea raids—beautiful furnishings, glassware and silverware, paintings, carpets and linens from a dozen countries. Jean had taste and from the loot he chose most fastidiously.

In this Grand Terre home Jean entertained his friends and rich customers from New Orleans and the plantations. Here he made deals that constantly enriched his community. Here he held conferences and tried to restrain his followers from disastrous acts of violence or from open acts of piracy that could be traced to Barataria.

We know by now that Jean was shrewd. We know that he realized he could not prevent all the ships operating out of Barataria from pirating vessels other than called for by their letters of marque. But he sought to curb their carelessness. He wanted to keep his colony, especially his own name, clean of that opprobrious word "pirate" as long as possible.

However, the warehouse was glutted at one time with merchandise decidedly English. Loot came in that was most definitely not Spanish. Still, the highpoint of Jean's career on the island and the incident that clinched his leadership and transformed the colony into a solid following behind him—win, lose or draw—was the Gambi Rebellion.



TILDEN LANDRY

THE BUCCANEERS HOLD A BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING

In spite of his popularity Jean Lafitte had many enemies.

These were represented not only by the constituted authority invested in Claiborne but by a growing group of thinking citizens who feared and disliked the increasing insolence of the Baratarians.

There were rumors of piracy. Too many ships had disappeared in the Gulf in calm weather—not foreign ships but American ships. The complaints of the Customs officials were commanding more consideration at Washington. They were not getting action, to be sure, but were at least receiving attention.

Everything was very vague as yet, but Jean knew that if it could be proven that one of his privateers had pillaged a ship of American register the popularity and romantic glamour of his business would fade overnight. He also knew that without popular support his enterprises would fail.

Remember that by this time the people of Louisiana had outgrown their early resentment against the United States Government. Self rule and its privileges had gradually been given them; they had been promised statehood as soon as they reached 60,000 people and a census had just been taken in 1810 showing they had 76,556; Julian Poydras, their delegate from the Territory in Congress, was pushing through their claim for admittance. The fusing of a dozen nationalities into freedom loving Americans was nearly completed—and Jean knew, even if his henchmen didn't, that crimes against American ships would be their last blunder. This was early in 1811.

Desperate to check the foolhardy of his band, of which Gambi was the worst offender, he decided to settle the matter of this out-and-out piracy once and for all.

He called ten men together at his brick house on Grand Terre for a decisive conference. Each man was the commander of a vessel.

In telling this story we are not making the common mistake of adolescent pirate tales. Not for a moment do we ask you to believe that Jean Lafitte, by the piercing power of his glance, could quell these lawless men. Nor do we assume that by superior sword arm or deadly pistol prowess could he demand that these men do anything against their common will.

Jean was a good leader partly because he was a good politician. And, like a good politician, he knew before he called this meeting that he controlled the majority of the votes. Pierre was there; the captains of his own boats; and others like Dominique You and Beluche who were level headed enough to know that privateering could be successfully continued but that piracy would be a losing game. There were only a couple of whom he was in doubt. Gambi, of course, was belligerently against anything that interfered with Gambi's plans.

So, feeling certain of the majority of the group, he called the conference, hoping that the recalcitrants would abide by the decision.



All that is left of the old Rigaud Cemetery where "Nez Coupe," and perhaps others of the pirates who turned peaceful, were buried on Grand Isle.

THE GAMBI REBELLION

Jean did the talking. He called attention to his earlier instructions that only Spanish vessels were to be taken as prizes. He reminded them that their letters of marque entitled them to attack ships of no other nation. Particularly, he emphasized, were they to avoid American vessels.

We can visualize Jean trying to reason with these guerrillas of the sea — men who were supposed to be waging independent warfare for some patriotic principle but who were actually interested only in the profits derived from their pillaging. They were drunk with success. Out in the Gulf and Caribbean were merchantmen of a dozen countries — theirs for the taking. Why should they limit themselves to merely ships of Spain? It wasn't an easy matter to convince them.

Angry arguments flew thick and fast for hours. "Nez Coupe" was finally won over and agreed to keep hands off American shipping at least. Gambi cursed and accused the others of being liars and swore he'd sink anything that came across his bow. But the council voted for the continuance of privateering and the strict avoidance of piracy.

Gambi left the meeting in a fury and went out to where his men were awaiting the outcome. The rest of the council dispersed. Realizing that this was the test of Lafitte's leadership they left him to handle Gambi.

Gambi called his men aside and Jean, from the window of his house, could see rebellion fomenting. Instead of calling for his own men he walked out alone on the veranda, in full view of the angry Gambi crew. The only indication of his awareness of trouble was the pistol in his belt.

The sight of him enraged the frustrated freebooters and they started toward him in a body. Gambi held back, not from fear, but undoubtedly because he wished his men to rush Lafitte. Later he could claim to Jean's loyal lieutenants that he momentarily lost control of his crew.

One young giant forged ahead of the others — big, brutal and every inch of him angry. He spat on the sand, a well understood insult, brandished his pistol and shouted that Gambi's men would take orders from no one but Gambi.

There was a shot from the veranda. The self-appointed spokesman fell on his face — dead. Jean stood still, his smoking pistol in his hand, calmly awaiting their next move.

The sudden elimination of their extemporaneous leader had stopped the others in their tracks. There was no need for further argument. They were thoroughly convinced that he couldn't be bluffed. As far as they were concerned, the rebellion had ended.

Gambi, however, did not cool off so easily. He could not disobey the edict, but he could transfer his own operations to another part of the Gulf. After this we always hear of Gambi at Chênière Caminada where later his black, ungovernable temper caused one of his own men to murder him.



TILDEN LANDRY

BROOM-HOPPING ON THE BAYOUS

Let's take "time out" for a moment. We've just got Jean out of trouble, so we can leave him for a while without worrying. Besides, we want you to get better acquainted with the other folk that lived in The Land of Lafitte.

Don't get the idea everybody below New Orleans were smugglers and pirates. Remember, a few pages back, we said that Louisiana in 1810 could brag over 76,000 people. Of this total the Baratarian smugglers and privateers could muster only about a thousand cutlasses. Then, if you figure another thousand to generously cover the go-betweens, the undercover men, the hangers-on and the small-fry, you can see that the difference still leaves a respectable balance of respectable people.

Lower Louisiana was hard to get into — hard to get out of. It still is. There are grandmothers living today in the town of Lafitte, only about twenty miles below New Orleans, who will tell you that in their girlhood a trip to New Orleans once a year was the mark of a well traveled Miss.

These isolated communities were practically self sufficient. They raised or caught or shot their own food, made their own clothes and provided their own entertainment.

The weekly Saturday night dance was the social event for all ages. Grandmothers, too rheumatic to trip the light fantastic (and believe us, that would be the only thing that would stop them) attended to catch up on the week's gossip. Mothers of infants parked their charges lengthwise on the benches that lined the dance floor, backed up chairs to keep them from falling off, and then proceeded to dance their younger sisters to a friendly draw. From the tender age of four to the mellowness of eighty, the dance was the place where gossip was exchanged, courtships developed and friendships made — not overlooking the several inevitable Saturday night fights.

Even today on Grand Isle, grandmothers and babes in arms gather on Saturday night around the juke boxes while the 'teen age girls and boys and the younger married folk exhibit jitterbugging skill that has behind it a century and a half of spirited folk dancing.

These isolated people also, when the need arose, performed their own marriage ceremonies. Sometimes the priest would not get around for months, creating a situation which was exceedingly annoying to ardent couples once they had plighted their troth. So, they found a way to circumvent this decidedly unpopular delay. They developed a public ceremony known as broom-hopping.

In full view of their neighbors, relatives and friends the engaged couple hopped over the ceremonial broom, symbolizing their mutual domestic intention to love, honor and obey. The overworked padre could put his church approval on the ceremony when he finally arrived. In the meantime, they were officially married as far as the community and the interested parties were concerned.

A very ingenious and self-reliant people — these bayou folk.



ALL SAINTS' NIGHT

Sometime, if you can possibly arrange it, plan to visit The Land of Lafitte on All Saints' Night. It's a sight you'll never forget — the cemeteries dotted with flickering candles as though, in all these sanctuaries of the dead, night blooming flowers had burst their buds at a given signal.

The custom dates back to a time in this bayou country — and, in some communities it still exists — when the scattered settlements had cemeteries but no churches. If they were fortunate, a priest might be able to visit their widely scattered groups two or three times a year.

They prepared for All Saints' Night a long time ahead by having their candles blessed at St. Louis Cathedral on a trip to New Orleans or by the Father that occasionally brought Mass to them.

With their candles, which had been previously blessed, they formed a procession at dusk on All Saints' Night and proceeded slowly to the cemetery where each person placed his or her candles around the family graves. The candles were lit as it grew dark. It was an anticipated event because always there was a family reunion and a gathering of relatives. Sometimes they talked and waited until the candles burned out. Sometimes they left them burning.

Eerie and ghostly were the shadows cast by the candles and the crosses. But the bayou folk were not afraid. Their dead were very close to them that night.

Cemeteries, in the lives of these deeply devout and isolated people, were, and still are, an important part of their existence. Throughout the generations the Indian custom of placing trinkets of the beloved dead in shadow boxes on their graves became inextricably interwoven with ancient ceremonies of the Catholic Church. These shadow boxes are usually wooden with glass fronts through which the offering may be seen. Many of them contain statues of Saints. Those of children often contain a doll or favorite toy.

In these cemeteries the negroes were given a special place along the bayou's edge.

Here, in the bayou country, where for generations flowing roads were the only means of travel, funerals by water were familiar spectacles. The coffin was placed in the stern of the first boat with the family, the pall bearers and the priest, if there was room for all. The other boats followed in slow procession until the cemetery by the water's edge was reached.

Funerals by water are still observed in parts of this liquid land because there are still people to whose home the bayou is the only approach.

To the stranger the Louisiana custom of burying in vaults or tombs above the ground seems unusual and — sort of pagan. However, it is a custom based on necessity rather than on any religious or racial practice. Here water is everywhere — even a few feet below the surface of the earth. Only on certain Indian mounds can graves successfully be placed in the ground.



These two photographs will explain to you, better than a thousand words, the ancient custom of the candles observed on All Saints' Night in The Land of Lafitte.



THE LAND OF LAFITTE THE PIRATE

TIMES THAT TRY MEN'S SOULS

Water, water everywhere — and not a trail to follow!

It must have been very discouraging to Claiborne's customs officers in those days, with no fast motor launches to whip through the bayous and suddenly intercept smugglers redhanded. Both the law and the lawless were forced to use pirogues, an even break which always worked to the advantage of the smugglers.

Lafitte, being a very astute operator, had agents on the inside who warned him of every searching party before it ever got started. All along the routes, after it was on its way from New Orleans to Barataria, were Lafitte outposts who signalled ahead that the customs men were on the prowl again.

Think how disheartening it must have been to those pioneer harbor patrols to hear, on their periodic forays for evidence, a conch shell sending its weird warning miles ahead — knowing, the minute they heard it, that any approaching smugglers would have many valuable minutes, before the police pirogue could even round the next bend, to scurry to a hundred hiding places.

It must have been very embarrassing to Claiborne to know that the community existed at Barataria — to know just what the inhabitants were doing — how many of them there were — and not be able to send a single gunboat to seize the contraband and arrest the smugglers.

It was embarrassing because he didn't have even . . . one . . . gunboat. In fact, he had no adequate police force or no military body of any character sufficient to cope with the well organized — and tough — smugglers.

He persistently pleaded for federal aid but smuggling was a little too petty for the United States Navy to meddle with at that time. Privateering was legal and out of their jurisdiction. Until actual acts of piracy could be established Claiborne was supposed to muddle through himself.

Anyhow, the Government had worries of its own. There was absolutely no doubt that a rupture with Great Britain would take place in the not too far distant future. Military leaders were trying to intelligently and strategically spread the nation's meagre armed forces to protect its vital spots in case of war, one of those vital spots being New Orleans. To make this more difficult, General Wilkinson, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, was being investigated for treason. No, the harrassed heads at Washington placed smuggling complaints on the bottom of the pile. There were other, more serious problems to solve.

Meanwhile Lafitte had expanded his operations. Depots of disposal extended as far north as Natchez, as far west as the Sabine River (which is now the border line between Texas and Louisiana) and as far east as Pensacola. His slaves were purchased by buyers from all over the South and a Lafitte slave auction was now an event of wide business importance.



This is known as the "Sentinel Tree."
It was said the smugglers marked such
trees as this to set up a woods code
understood only by them.

THE SLAVE INSURRECTION

Purchasers flocked to Barataria to look over merchandise hot off the prizes. Orders for the rare bargains poured in from as far off as New York and Philadelphia. To meet the demand the Baratarian privateers in their low, fast schooners plundered more and more indiscriminately the merchantmen of any and every nation. Rumors persisted that even American vessels clearing from New Orleans had been captured and every person murdered.

We will never know whether greed eventually overcame even Lafitte's caution or whether his corsairs were able to pillage American ships without his being the wiser; but we do know that nothing that sailed was now safe in the Gulf.

Rumor was not yet strong enough to hurt sales. Jean had powerful connections in the city. Bankers bid for his account. Even far-from-handsome Dominique You was often seen these days in the company of such influential citizens as the rich merchant, Auguste Davezac, who was the brother-in-law of Edward Livingston, who was himself right hand adviser to Governor Claiborne and brother to Robert Livingston who had been Minister to France when Louisiana was purchased.

Then happened the first incident — the first real meaty morsel into which the opponents of Lafitte could sink their teeth — the first actual occurrence which had ever been able to undermine the smugglers' popularity in Louisiana.

This was the slave insurrection of January, 1811.

Hundreds of negroes, many of them lately from the jungles of Africa and still more lately from the slave barracoon at Barataria, ran away from their masters in the Parish of St. John the Baptist, just thirty-five miles above New Orleans. They had formed themselves into a howling, frenzied mob ready for killing and burning.

White men and women fled for their lives. The slaves, drunk with their initial success made possible by surprise, organized themselves into a semblance of a military body and marched on New Orleans with beating drums and flags flying. They picked up other slaves as they went along and before they were finally checked had burned five plantation homes.

One man, a plantation owner by the name of Trepagnier, refused to leave his plantation and defied them with only a double barreled fowling piece. This unforeseen resistance, even though they were by this time five hundred strong, broke their animal confidence. They wavered, cursed and decided to by-pass him and continue on their way — promising profusely and profanely to return that night and cut his throat from ear to ear.

Within a mile of the Trepagnier plantation they were met by a strong body of militia hastily mustered under the command of Major Hilton who had been summoned from Baton Rouge. At the first volley of the white men the slaves broke and ran. Many were slaughtered on the spot. Some were taken prisoner. Those who escaped to the woods and swamps were hunted down one by one.

A photograph of a narrow, unpaved path winding through a dense, dark forest. Sunlight filters through the thick canopy of trees and foliage, creating a dappled pattern of light and shadow on the ground and the path. The trees are tall and slender, with their trunks visible through the undergrowth. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and secluded.

Chemin du Fort Blanc, an old military road built by the French but abandoned before the Louisiana Purchase—a road that ran along Cabinage Brule and became very useful to the smugglers.

LOUISIANA'S FIRST COAST GUARD

At the formal investigation it was claimed that the new slaves, the ones smuggled in by the Baratarians, were the revolt leaders. But, it could not be proven. Claiborne took advantage of the aroused feeling to appeal again strongly to the legislature for men and money. He would send an expedition into Barataria and wipe out that nest of riot rousers once and for all.

The request was disregarded. There was a suspicion, even in that day, that Lafitte money had found its way into the legislature. You can be certain Jean would have overlooked no such possibility if the receptive palms were there. Anyhow, the incident soon blew over—helped, of course, by the fact that no whites had been killed. The Creoles were very willing to forget an unfortunate happening, especially since slaves and wares were so cheap at Barataria.

It was nearly a year later that Claiborne succeeded in arousing legislative aid to any extent. What might be called a primitive Coast Guard was organized under a Captain Holmes and he, with a company of forty dragoons, set out in several boats to deal with Lafitte.

As usual, the news was carried to Jean. He was highly amused when he learned that only forty men had been sent to arrest or disperse over a thousand of the "fightinest" devils on the Seven Seas.

As you can guess, Holmes and his patrol encountered only innocent fishermen bringing oysters and shrimp to market. To show their contempt, Jean and Pierre personally brought a record shipment of contraband right past Holmes and his men, merely by the expedient of using the route where Holmes wasn't.

Holmes was too good a military man to attempt to attack Barataria with his force. He could only hope to intercept and arrest contraband on its way to one of the depots. Holmes was a bulldog and kept trying—but was constantly outsmarted.

Lafitte, however, while he treated the affair as a joke, again recommended discretion to his men and took the precaution of fortifying Grand Terre with cannon from some of his ships. Outside of that, the incident seemed to pass like the others and smuggling continued without the slightest noticeable effect from the forty man patrol still hunting somewhere in the bayous.

Beyond bayouland, however, three great events, like actors waiting their cue, watched Lafitte repeat an act which the audience had been applauding for years.

They were not jealous professionally. They were stars of greater national magnitude. One was Louisiana Statehood, long billed as a coming attraction. The second was War, a melodrama and a thriller. And the third was the steamboat which, at first, was destined to receive catcalls from a derisive audience but would eventually settle into a permanent engagement.

All three knew that when they came on stage the popular act of Jean Lafitte, Juggler, would no longer receive top billing.

There is a legend that at exactly midnight, when the moon is full, Lafitte's ghost may be seen at this spot, the intersection of Bayou Coquille and Bayou des Familles . . . a favorite water cross roads in those days.



JEAN LAFITTE IS CAPTURED!

History tells us very little about Captain Holmes of the Bayou Patrol, but by reading between the lines we gather he was a very persistent fellow.

Time and time again his weary dragoons followed false trails and failed to report even a near miss. Holmes and his human hounds were beginning to look a bit ridiculous — until the night of November 16, 1812.

We emphasize this date strongly because it was the first time the law and the Lafittes had ever tangled. Holmes and his men surprised a fleet of five pirogues and skiffs from Barataria, headed for New Orleans, laden to the gunwales with contraband (mostly cinnamon) valued later at \$4,004.89 and under the personal leadership of both Pierre and Jean Lafitte.

The Lafittes saw that their party was outnumbered and that they were helpless to escape — so, they submitted to arrest, twenty-nine of them.

The procedure from there was very similar to arrests in our own bootleg days. Jean and Pierre were brought to New Orleans where they immediately arranged bail for themselves and their men. They were back on the streets in a few hours. The trial was set for November 29th and the charge was "smuggling goods subject to revenue duties, the same not having been paid."

A great deal of credit must be given to Captain Holmes for the capture of the Lafittes. It wasn't luck. He actually out-manuevered the master.

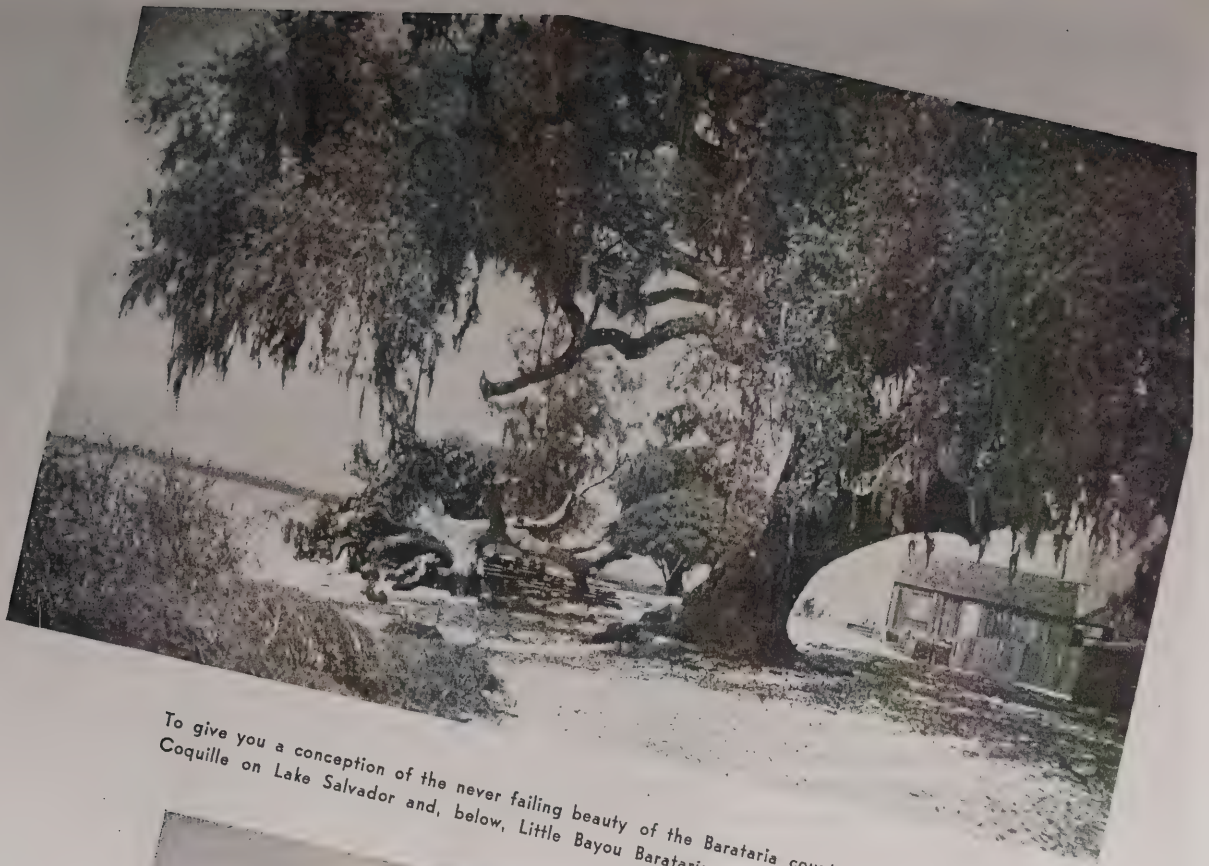
His camp was supposed to be thirty-five miles away. Jean's spies had reported him there, blissfully unaware another load was going through. But, somehow, he was lurking in the shadows of the lake shore near the Temple, one of Lafitte's most important depots. When the contraband fleet headed across Salvador to enter the mouth of Bayou des Allemands, Holmes and his boats shot out at them from concealment, catching them redhanded in the bright moonlight.

There was no mistaking the authority of those dragoons: Captain Holmes in his white jacket and pantaloons — the men in white corded blue uniforms, plumed helmets and white cartridge belts — plus the most convincing of all arguments, muskets with black bayonets fixed.

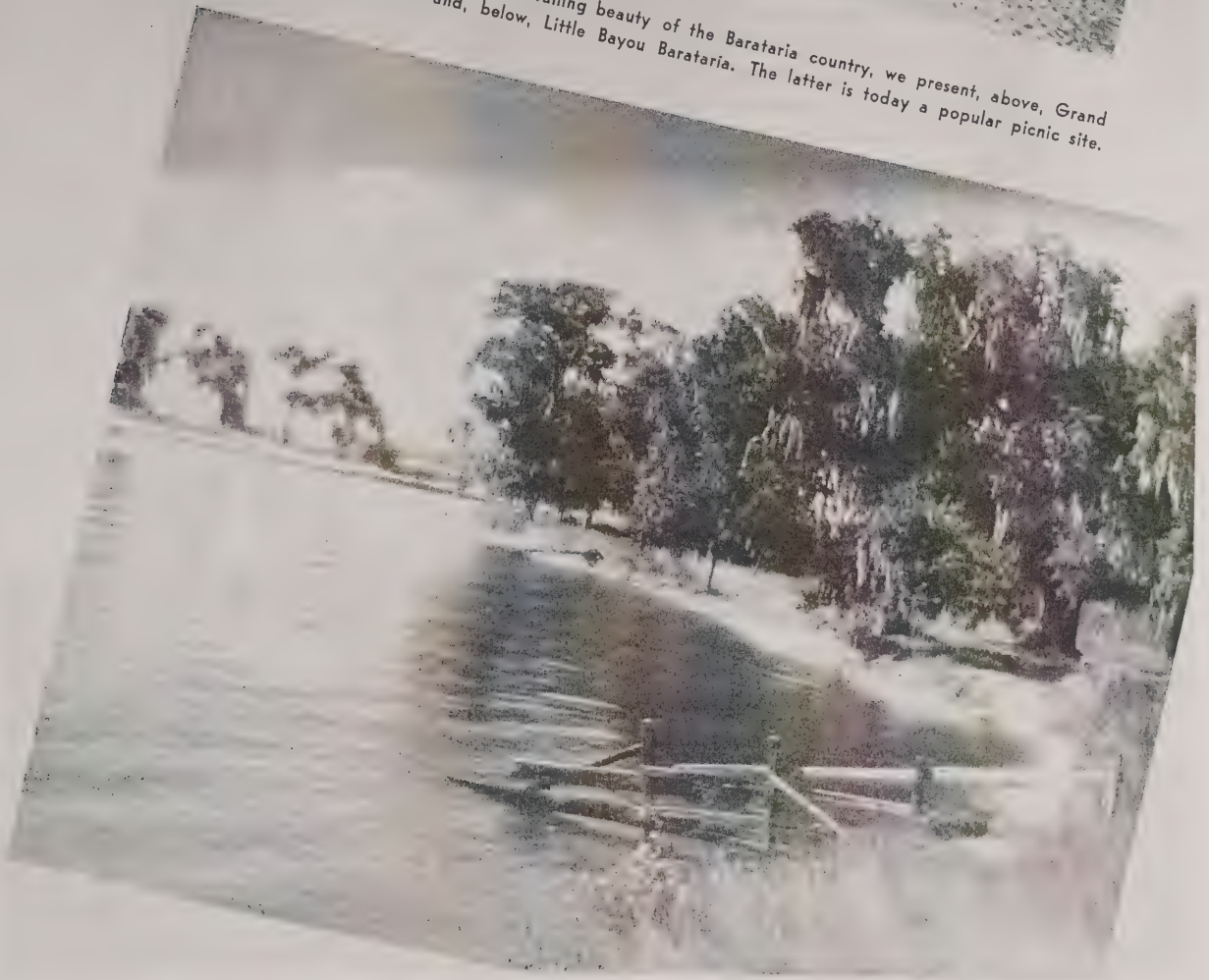
First blood for the side of law and order! Eight years Claiborne had been patiently waiting for this moment. But nobody realized better than he that it was merely personal satisfaction. The charge was not strong enough to convict them. It was merely an auspicious beginning.

There is one point about this episode that is worthy of mention. Although the smugglers' party was composed of nearly thirty men and was convoying four thousand dollars worth of contraband, Lafitte had made no provisions for armed resistance. The reports showed that only three loaded muskets, a couple of swords and a dirk were found.

It would appear that Jean, at this particular period, had more faith in guile than in guns.



To give you a conception of the never failing beauty of the Barataria country, we present, above, Grand Coquille on Lake Salvador and, below, Little Bayou Barataria. The latter is today a popular picnic site.



A FAMOUS SUNDAY MORNING DISCUSSION

Remember those coming events we mentioned? In April of 1812 the United States had admitted Louisiana to statehood and just six weeks later declared war on Great Britain.

While the first had been definitely a blow to Lafitte's kingdom of cards, the second was decidedly a break for the Baratarians. It was obvious the Navy would now be too busy with British men-of-war to worry about a few pestiferous pirates in the Gulf. All things considered, the Lafitte luck seemed to be still riding high, in spite of the temporary loss of dignity so neatly inflicted by Holmes.

On November 25th, just nine days after the arrest of Jean and Pierre, on a beautiful Sunday morning, a stranger named Williams arrived in New Orleans with a gory tale of piracy. According to his story he had been one of the crew of an American merchantman returning from Africa.

They had put into Havana for repairs. And, after leaving Havana, had been almost immediately attacked by pirates. The crew had been murdered and the vessel plundered. Miraculously he had escaped and had somehow made his way to the Cuban coast. There he had been picked up by a French sailing ship and brought to New Orleans.

The story leaped from lip to lip and soon this whole excitable town was seething with bitter tirades against the "pirates." What pirates? Well, there were people here and there who did not hesitate to insinuate that it was Lafitte and his Baratarians.

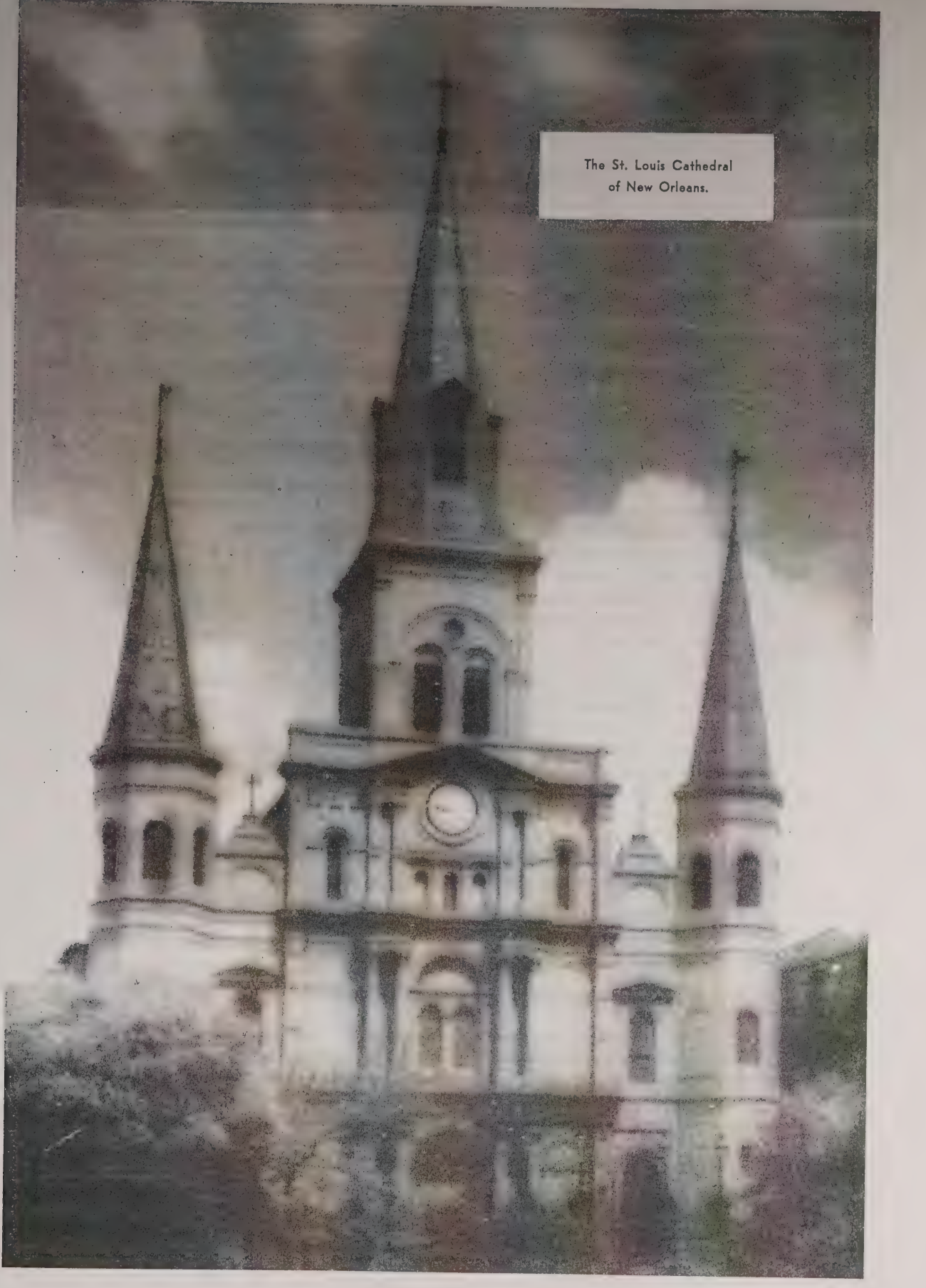
The English speaking citizens appointed a delegation to again demand action from Governor Claiborne. But the Creoles rallied to the defense of Lafitte. There was no proof, they said. Had not Lafitte always declared that he warred only on Spanish vessels?

Yet, countered others, did not Lafitte control all the privateers in the Gulf? Was he not the leader? If any of them had turned pirate, wouldn't he know it?

Gossip flew back and forth like the shuttlecock in a game of badminton. The populace was definitely excited and the Place d'Armes was filled with controversial groups. Everybody that day was either for or against Lafitte.

Here was where Jean revealed another facet of his leadership — a perfect sense of the dramatic. Faultlessly attired, both he and Pierre, arm in arm, suddenly made their appearance right among the people who were discussing them. Speak of the devil! Nonchalantly they strolled from the direction of the St. Louis Cathedral toward the Cabildo where they were official business right at that moment.

To all appearances the brothers Lafitte had not a care in the world. They exchanged greetings with those they knew and raised their rakish black hats to the charming Creole women who were a little shocked, but secretly thrilled.



The St. Louis Cathedral
of New Orleans.

GENERAL HUMBERT'S DINNER

What composure! The Creoles could appreciate this elegant arrogance. Even the lesser citizens were impressed by the Lafittes' very indifference to the unproven suspicion of — of — who really started this? Oh, yes, that man Williams! Who was he but a stranger nobody knew? And, after all, didn't he say the ship was coming from Africa? Didn't that mean the boat was a slaver? A slaver complaining about piracy! What gall . . . the pot calling the kettle black!

The crowd, as crowds always do, as quickly veered the other way. They became convinced Williams was a troublemaker. In the meantime Mr. Grymes, the District Attorney, had officially prepared a report and the newspaper carried the story. The authorities read the report and the public read the newspaper. A week later both had forgotten the flare-up.

The Lafittes had weathered another storm. Their personal name was still free of that terrible word "pirate." However, on the same night, Jean was not so fortunate at a dinner given in honor of General Humbert.

General Humbert was one of the most colorful characters of 1812 New Orleans. At 19 he was a Major General. His leadership at the attack on Landau is historically recorded "as one of the boldest feats of arms ever accomplished." He was, unhappily, one of the Generals under Leclerc, Napoleon's brother-in-law, in the ill-fated expedition against the insurgents of Santo Domingo.

General Humbert commanded one-third of the forces that were sent to quell the insurrection of Toussaint L'Overture and met a more powerful and deadly foe than rebellious natives — yellow fever.

Leclerc died. Napoleon recalled the army but General Humbert, having taken the widow of his late commander as his mistress, none other than Pauline Bonaparte, incurred the royal disfavor and was exiled. Later he escaped and sought sanctuary in New Orleans.

Here he drank too much, trying to drown his dreams of former glory. But he was a popular Frenchman — and on this night of which we speak was celebrating his fifty-seventh birthday among his friends.

General Humbert was a lover of rough and ready companions. Many of the Baratarians were his boon buddies. So, it was natural that the corsairs were well represented at this dinner. There were Jean and Pierre; Beluche and Dominique You; La Porte, the dark, smiling bookkeeper of the Lafittes; Sauvinet, their financial backer, who tonight functioned as Master of Ceremonies; even Gambi and "Nez Coupe."

The dinner was an epicurean masterpiece. Lyle Saxon, authority on Lafitte, tells us that the menu, to mention only a few mouth watering items, consisted of hors d'oeuvres, crab gumbo, roast turkey stuffed with pecans and raisins, red fish cooked in white wine sauce . . . and, to top it off, wines of rare vintage plundered from some unfortunate Spanish galleon.



TILDEN LANDRY

"Knives came out of sleeves and scabbards . . ."

LAFITTE, THE SMUGGLER, BECOMES LAFITTE, THE PIRATE

Finally cigars were lit and the slightly sleepy guests leaned back to hear one of their number eulogize the grand old warrior who sat at their head, a little drunker than usual.

Unfortunately, the flattering words evoked out of the dim past his almost forgotten triumphs and the alcohol in his brain made him feel very sorry for himself until, to quote Saxon again, he arose from his armchair and sobered his guests with a sudden declaration of hate:

"Your words," he shouted, "remind me of what I was and of what I am." He gulped and clutched his throat. "I must not remain here as an associate of outlaws and pirates. No, my place is not here."

He turned on Beluche, whom he especially disliked, and poured on Lafitte's lieutenant a scathing abuse that left no doubt that he considered the whole assemblage a gang of murderers and pirates.

Knives came out of sleeves and scabbards. Some of the party would have avenged the insults in blood if Jean Lafitte had not held up his hand and demanded quiet. His action caused the old man to break down and cry. The tension was broken but so was the friendship that had existed between these men and General Humbert.

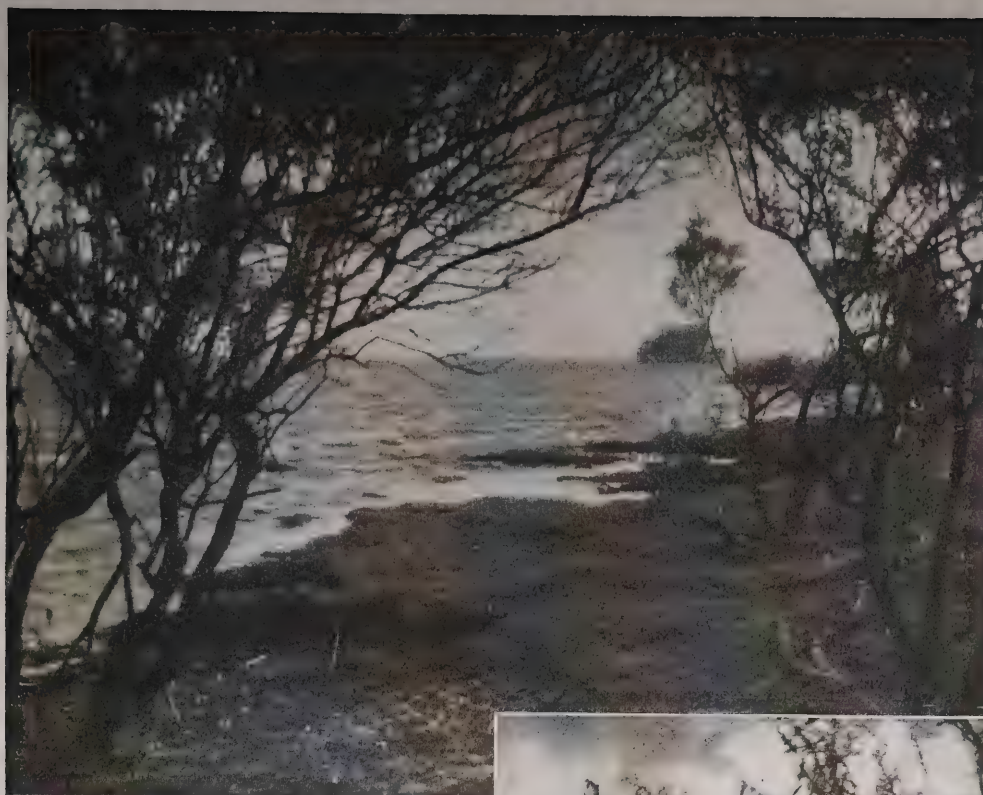
The next day the Old War Horse was back at his favorite cafe drinking his favorite "le petit gouave." He had forgotten the incident. It had been a very hazy experience anyway.

Jean Lafitte never forgot. Up to that time he perhaps deluded himself that he could stay clean of piracy. Maybe the combination of a bad day and a bitter evening made him realize that men in their cups blurt out what sober men think and keep to themselves.

Jean's public appearances grew less following the Humbert Dinner. He threw himself savagely into the smuggling — privateering — piracy — call it what you will. Names didn't matter with Jean any longer.

This was undoubtedly the turning point in Jean Lafitte's career, the point at which he mentally accepted piracy. Up to that time, he may have intended to abandon smuggling, when he had made enough money, and enter legitimate business in New Orleans. But after that eventful Sunday he seemed to realize there was no turning back.

This critical stage in Jean's career was also a critical one with the whole nation. The American army was not so successful in this year of 1812. Reports of the war were not encouraging, even though such naval names as Decatur and Bainbridge and Porter were being discussed respectfully in British ward-rooms.



Two of the larger lakes on which Lafitte's convoys of contraband moved under cover of darkness were Lake Pontchartrain above and Lake Salvador below. Through Pontchartrain went his wares to Biloxi and Pensacola. And, on Lake Salvador's shore, was his famous depot "The Temple."



"ARREST JEAN LAFITTE ON SIGHT!"

Only four days after the unconfirmed Williams accusation and the humiliating Humbert dinner the Lafittes were called for trial on the smuggling charge. Neither Jean nor Pierre appeared in court. Instead came Sauvinet, their financial representative.

John R. Grymes, State's Attorney, respectfully submitted to the court that Jean Lafitte be duly cited to appear and answer the plaint and that judgment be rendered against him in favor of the United States for three times the value of the smuggled goods, as was the penalty under the law.

The court agreed. The judgment was granted, a tidy sum of a little more than twelve thousand dollars; the Lafittes forfeited their bonds; a writ demanding Jean's court appearance was placed in the hands of the Marshal of the Louisiana District — and, all in all, it looked like a bad day for the Barataria "Bos."

Actually, it was little more than a ruffle in Lafitte's life and a very minor victory for Claiborne. The Lafittes could well afford the loss of both the posted bond and the twelve thousand dollar judgment. Besides, in order to serve the writ, the Marshal had to locate Jean, which proved not only difficult but impossible.

Six different renewals of the original writ were sworn out at succeeding sessions of court but none were ever served. All are preserved to this day, marked "Not found in New Orleans." This game of hide and seek went on for nearly a year.

About all the arrest and the writs accomplished was to force Jean to abandon his public appearances. In reality he moved just as freely as before — but not so openly. The nefarious business of the Baratarians was more brisk than ever and their behavior grew worse as their prosperity and power increased.

It was said that in the distribution of prize money and loot during these lush days the sorriest sailor shared no less than \$500 a month. There was no way of estimating the wealth of the Lafittes at this period but they had long passed the point where they needed financial help from Sauvinet. In fact, nowadays, he was deeply involved handling their money.

This was early in 1813. In spite of the more frequent skirmishes with the law and the growing suspicion in the minds of the people that American blood frequently stained the profits of the privateers — now more frequently called "pirates" — Jean Lafitte and his men were riding the crest of their career.

The war, however, was coming closer and closer to New Orleans, whose inhabitants were more concerned with the doings of Lafitte than with the British danger.



The bayous in The Land of Lafitte are streams too large to be creeks, too lazy to be rivers. To add to the confusion of the stranger, they sometimes flow forward, sometimes backward. Of the many traveled by the smugglers we present Bayou Gauche and Bayou Signette.



NEVER A DULL MOMENT

Two sources of information are available to us as we dig into what was happening back there one hundred and thirty years ago in this lovely and very lively Land of Lafitte — legend and fact.

Legend tells us that raucous sounds of revelry by night became more frequent at Grand Terre. Privateers and their prizes were pulling in almost constantly, following which the beach would be littered with drunken groups celebrating their success. The loud laughter of the women who consorted with these lawless men often would be punctuated with curdling screams which nobody took the trouble to investigate.

Stories come down to us of bodies still lying on the sand at daybreak — some dead, some merely dead drunk. Fights were part of the debauchery and the revelers never wasted any time or sympathy on the losers. A knife expertly applied to a vital spot immediately removed the victim not only from the land of the living but completely from the concern of his shipmates.

Privateer crews celebrating shore leave, their pockets filled with prize money, also frequented the grog shops and tawdry houses of New Orleans. Nowadays they made no effort to stay out of trouble with the City Guards. Confident in numbers they paraded the streets at night singing their obscene songs and cursing loudly.

As it so happened, their favorite carousing spots were also the choice haunts of the Mississippi River flatboatmen, known as the "Kentuckians."

When the last vestige of Spanish rule was removed from Louisiana vast armadas of heavily laden flatboats drifted down the Kentucky, the Ohio and the Mississippi to New Orleans. These were manned by the wildest breed of devil-may-care sons that America ever bred. For weeks they labored with their long booms to avoid snags, eddies, sandbars and boat wreckers, which we would call hi-jackers today. For weeks they stored up their cussedness to the boiling point. By the time they got to New Orleans and were freed from their labors they were ready for a fight or a frolic — you just name it. Rough and tumble fighting was their favorite pastime and every gang had its champion who had never been "whupped."

When the Baratarians met these Kentuckians young riots usually developed and, in too many cases, luckless respectable citizens who got in the middle were killed or injured.

There is a story that Jean Lafitte himself met Roarin' Jack Russell, champion of the rivermen, at a New Orleans' dance hall one night. Their feet tangled somehow on the floor and, as the story goes, the militiamen had to quell the fight that broke out between Lafitte's Baratarians and Russell's Kentuckians.

The townspeople never did enthuse over the flatboatmen. They were now getting very fed up with the smugglers, too. Fires, riots, murders, the accosting of women — everything in the book was blamed on Lafitte's men.



As Lafitte pillaged many lands and deposited his loot in Louisiana, Ol' Man River purloined the rich top soil of North America and deposited it in this same country. The Robin Hood of the rivers must have had a feeling of camaraderie for the Gentleman Pirate.

THE PRIVATE PAPERS OF A PRIVATEER

We believe this is the time to reveal some of the professional secrets of privateering. On the opposite page is a reproduction of an agreement between Jean Lafitte (referred to as the privateer) and the Captain of the Mexican privateer "Le Brave." You can see, in the translation given below, how difficult it was to prove piracy, even in the private papers of these wily gentlemen. Especially, when we remember that this particular agreement comes down to us from that later period in Lafitte's career, long after the Battle of New Orleans, when he had established another so called privateering colony at Galveston and was definitely considered a pirate by all and sundry.

We ask you to note in Article 7 the pioneer of "workman's compensation" and in Articles 8, 10 and 11 the ingenious incentives to the crew.

"Today 18th, August 1819 it has been agreed and fixed between us, privateer, captain, officers and crew of the Mexican Corsair called Le Brave as follows, to wit:

"Article 1. Half of all that is captured will belong to the privateer.

"Article 2. The privateer will have a commission of 5% on the gross total of all that shall be captured and brought into this port.

"Article 3. The captain may retain a commission of 5% on the net amount which is awarded to the crew.

"Article 4. In the event that the captain and the crew should happen to capture another ship which seems to them more suitable than the corsair, and if they therefore transfer to their prize and abandon the latter, this prize shall belong by right and in all fairness to the privateer in order to reimburse him for the loss of the corsair.

"Article 5. All arms and armaments found on a prize belong of right to the privateer.

"Article 6. Any officer or sailor who shall be in charge of a prize and shall bring it into this port shall be allotted one part extra in title of gratification.

"Article 7. Any man who shall lose the use of a limb in course of an engagement will receive an indemnity of \$800 which shall be a first charge on the prize money.

"Article 8. Any man who, when boarding, is the first to jump on board the enemy vessel shall receive one part in title of gratification.

"Article 9. Any man who deserts, or who steals on board, or who is put ashore because of bad conduct shall lose his share of the prize.

"Article 10. Whoever first sights a ship which later becomes a prize shall receive one-half part in title of gratification.

"Article 11. The captain is awarded four parts to divide as a bonus among those officers or sailors whose conduct has been the best.

"Article 12. All arms and munitions of war which are found aboard a prize belong of right to the equipment of the ship.

"Article 13. All prize money shall be distributed as follows: To the captain 6 parts, plus 4 parts as bonus; to the second officer 4 parts; to the lieutenant 3 parts; to the prize captain 2 parts; to the mate 2 parts; to the master gunner one and one-half parts; to the cook one and one-half parts; to each other crew member one part."

THE LOOT OF LAFITTE

We have been talking about Lafitte loot for a long time. What became of it is a question that has bothered easy money dreamers for over a century.

Down on Grand Isle the old timers will tell you that practically every foot of the island was dug up at one time or another by treasure seekers. Louisiana itself has been fine combed. In 1851 a sum of buried gold was actually found on Caillou Island. First reports gave it as "twenty thousand dollars in Spanish doubloons." Later reports came down to "two thousand dollars." It merely started the pot boiling again. As late as 1925 treasure hunting was reported on Pecan Island. Spasmodic simmerings occur here and there even to this day.

There was a New Orleans printer by the name of Newell who searched a lifetime for the Lafitte treasure. His father had befriended a seafaring stranger who had given him, in return for his kindness, a map purported to show the location of Lafitte's buried loot. Newell became interested in the map as a boy and spent every cent he could save and all the time he could spare searching the coasts and islands shown on the map. He was finally drowned during a tropical storm on one of these expeditions.

A little common sense would save a lot of disappointment. Pirates often buried their plunder. But, even though Lafitte was finally and irrevocably classified in that category, he did not operate in the conventional pirate manner. His plunder was mostly salable merchandise which was disposed of in the ready markets he had built up. His slaves brought cash. Lafitte, like the reputable business men he attempted to emulate, banked his money. His men, like gangsters always do and always will, spent theirs as fast as they got it. Therefore, it is not strange that no secret hoards of Baratarian booty have ever been unearthed. Their contraband merged with the merchandise of the day and their profits circulated and disappeared as money always circulates and leaves its original owners.

About the only loot that has survived those days are a few gold pieces that could not be spent, like the Chighizola thimble; and a few jewels that were presented by one or another of that freebooting band to ladies they admired, which trinkets have passed from generation to generation as family heirlooms.

The beautiful finger ring we show you here is one of those personal pieces that passed from the possession of one of Lafitte's men, undoubtedly in a moment of romantic fervor, before he could lose it in gambling or turn it into cash that would buy a jewel much more satisfying to a pirate — the shimmering amber of lusty liquor.

Let your imagination run riot as to what grande dame once wore this regal topaz in its setting of exquisite filigree and gleaming pearls! Was it torn from her dying hand? Was she herself taken prisoner and perhaps preferred mating with a pirate to death? Or was she the consort of one of these freebooters who wore the jewels of murdered victims?



Down through the years has passed this ring—all that is left of the loot from some luckless Spanish galleon.

LAFITTE DEFIES AUTHORITY — ADVERTISES HIS AUCTIONS

To get back to the Baratarians and their doings — the Spring of 1813! One of the reasons why their bravado and brass were not dealt with summarily by the authorities, who were now in a better position to execute their edicts, was that Claiborne, the Legislature and the Federal Government had other worries that were more pressing. New Orleans very definitely feared a British invasion.

However, this fear did not interfere with the popular buying and selling of contraband. Weekly deliveries came to New Orleans even though Holmes and his men occasionally confiscated a shipment. Lesser lights were arrested now and then but Jean and Pierre were too wary to be caught twice the same way.

The smugglers grew so bold in their operations that their auctions were now publicly advertised. Handbills, signed by both Lafittes, brazenly announced that slaves and merchandise would be put up for bid at "The Temple." The dates were stated and merchants and planters invited to attend.

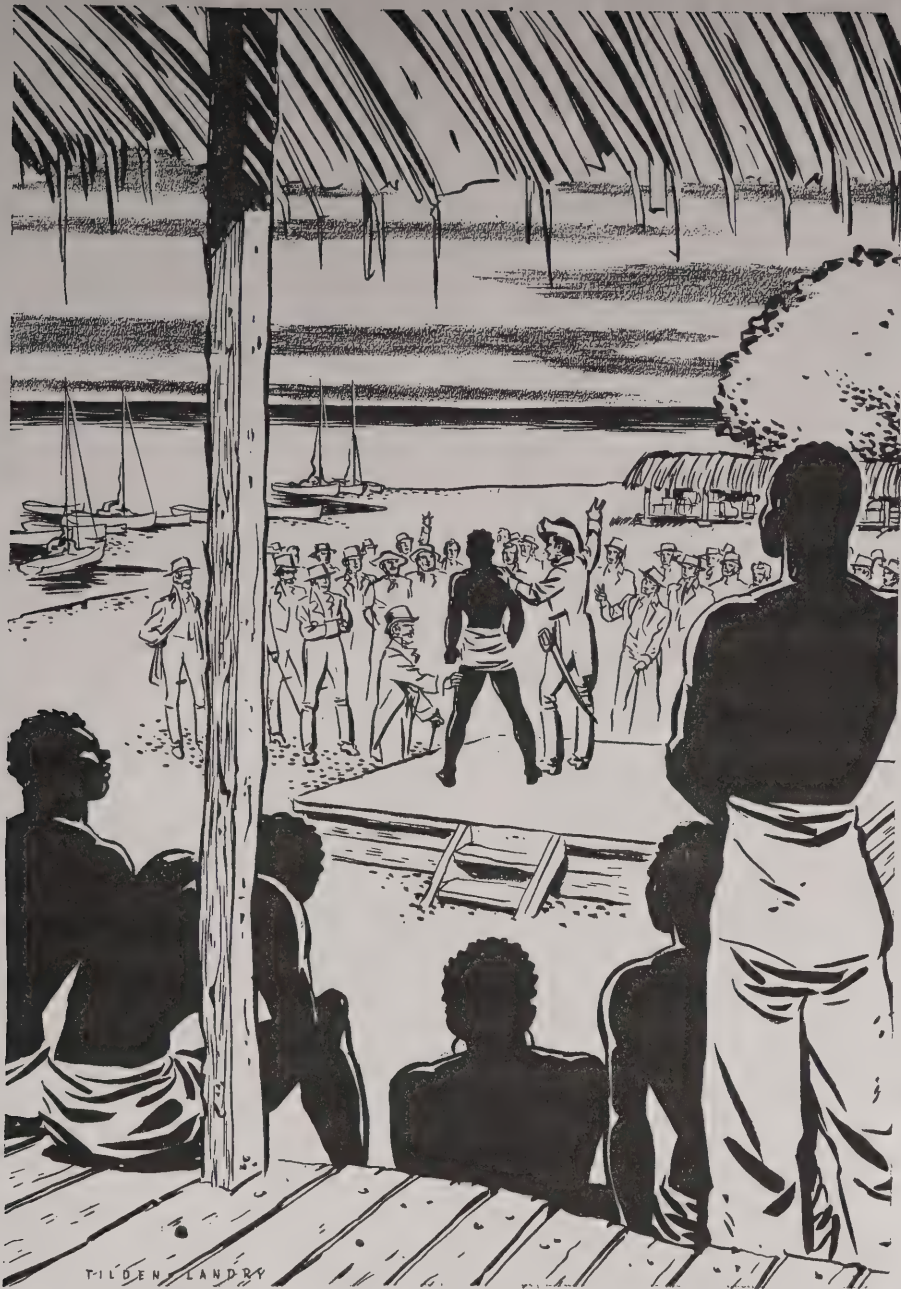
"The Temple" was the next most important spot to Grand Terre in the smugglers' set-up. It was located midway between Barataria Bay and New Orleans. It was a strategic point both as a warehousing and distributing center.

Look at your map again. We'll locate "The Temple" for you and point out its advantages to the smugglers. Right where Bayou des Allemandes enters Lake Salvador is a "chênière" — one of those occasional mounds of white shells covered with live oaks which rise above the surrounding marshland and provide high and dry areas for human occupation. "The Temple" gained its name from its Indian history. It was believed to be the scene of human sacrifices back in the days when the redmen alone ruled this water wilderness.

Here Lafitte's men built docks upon which they unloaded their sailing skiffs and freight pirogues. They constructed open sheds with thatch roofs where they spread out their merchandise or auctioned off their slaves. It was much nearer to New Orleans than Grand Terre and therefore more convenient to customers.

It could not be raided easily. Even to this day the shores of Lake Salvador are impassable salt marshes with no places to land except a few spots like "The Temple." A large body of men could approach it only by the bayou or across the lake. In either event the smugglers would have sufficient warning. History tells us that in spite of his pressing worries Claiborne actually sent several expeditions to raid "The Temple," to arrest its occupants and confiscate its goods. But always they found the place deserted — the docks, barracoons and storehouses empty.

On the opposite page we have reconstructed "The Temple" as it was in the days of Lafitte's popular slave auctions.



TILDEN LANDRY

LAFITTE CHARMS MADAME CLAIBORNE

"The Temple" also made an excellent contact point with the plantation owners, to whom the Lafitte traders sold direct without going through the city channels.

It must be remembered that many of these plantations were large operations in those days, self sustaining communities consisting of several hundred whites and negroes. The famous plantations in Tchoupitoulas above New Orleans, in the 1803 census, were credited with 7,444 people. Sometimes the smugglers brought their goods to the plantations. Sometimes the plantation owners visited Grand Terre or the more convenient "Temple." To these wealthy buyers went the healthiest and huskiest slaves and the most expensive contraband. They were the smugglers' best customers.

These plantations were mostly all owned by wealthy Creoles with whom Jean Lafitte was very popular. Many nights when Holmes and his men were combing the bayous for this elusive smuggler, he was sleeping contentedly in a massive four poster at the comfortable plantation home of a Creole friend.

One of the most amusing stories of Jean's career concerns his accidental meeting with Governor Claiborne's wife at one of the plantations between Barataria and New Orleans.

Wanted by the authorities, he had stopped at this beautiful mansion and was warmly welcomed by its hostess. Hardly had Jean arrived, however, when the negro servant announced the approach of the carriage of another guest.

The lady of the plantation was greatly perturbed when she discovered her second visitor was the Governor's wife—the most charming, the most beautiful and the most coquettish woman in New Orleans.

Hastily gathering her wits together she realized that while Madame Claiborne knew of Jean Lafitte she had never met him and would not recognize him. With adroit handling she could extend hospitality to both guests without embarrassing either.

So, she sent all the servants away except a trusted negress Henrietta, whom she warned to address Monsieur Lafitte as Monsieur Clement.

Jean was amused at the situation and entered into it with all his easy grace. Madame Claiborne, of course, was very gracious to the handsome and intelligent stranger. The hostess was delighted at the success of her perfect supper and little plot.

Later, in New Orleans, Madame Claiborne was extravagant in her praise of the most remarkable man she had ever met.

The Governor's wife was not the only one who fell victim to the spell of this paradoxical pirate. Tales have come to us of the hospitality he lavished on his guests at Grand Terre and how he sent them away convinced that one so thoroughly a gentleman could not be a blackguard. His constant charm was one of the secrets of his long success.

A color photograph of a large, two-story plantation house with a wide porch, surrounded by trees and a lawn. The house has a light-colored exterior and a dark roof. The porch is supported by several columns. There are two dormer windows on the roof. The house is set on a grassy lawn with trees in the background. The photograph is oriented horizontally on the page.

This is "Elmwood," the oldest
plantation in the Mississippi
Valley.

THE BRITISH TANGLE WITH THE BARATARIANS

Although charming and gracious when the necessity arose Jean Lafitte had changed. He was more morose and quicker to anger. He brooded over the fact that he was considered an outlaw and seemingly had decided to play the cards that Fate had dealt him. His favorite expression in 1813 was "I would as soon drown in ten feet of water as in six!"

He took longer chances. The tempo of his operations increased and regular convoys defied the law on all three of his important routes. The main route, between Barataria Bay and New Orleans, hummed with illegal transit. A second important route followed Bayou Lafourche to Donaldsonville, where he had established another depot to supply that territory. A third major route was opened with Last Island, some sixty miles west of Grand Terre, as the Gulf Base and running up the famous Bayou Teche into the "Evangeline" country where the rice planters had settled. Even the most remote plantations now were reached by the Lafitte network.

Claiborne, in an effort to stimulate his officers and to discourage the populace from buying contraband, issued a proclamation on March 15th in which he denounced the residents near the shores of Lake Barataria as "banditti committing piracies on the high seas." He cautioned the people of Louisiana against holding intercourse with such high offenders and exhorted every citizen to assist the officers of the law.

Nothing happened except a few more abortive expeditions into the maze of bayous and lakes, on the approach of which all activities in the wilderness seemed to sink into the swamps but which, immediately they withdrew, sprang into action with renewed vigor.

Claiborne and the very busy U. S. Government were not the only ones annoyed with the Baratarians. Seemingly the allegations of piracy were not without grounds. The swift, slender schooners of the Lafitte privateers had stung the British *Lion* too often and on June 23rd a British sloop-of-war appeared near the mouth of Bayou Lafourche. A boatload of English marines was dispatched to avenge the sinkings of too many English merchantmen.

It so happened that two privateers were anchored off shore and, although surprised at their presence, the British attacked them with more bravery than brains. The English delusion that two redcoats could handle a dozen ruffians was much in evidence here.

The privateers' forces were not only greater, they were more familiar with this type of hand to hand fighting. Severely trounced, a few English survivors withdrew to their sloop and sailed away.

On October 14th a small force of dragoons under Captain Gilbert, a U. S. Revenue Officer, again surprised a smuggling party with Jean at its head. This time he did not surrender. He fought back. One of Gilbert's men was wounded, the rest routed. The Baratarians proceeded on their way—but blood had been shed.



Donaldsonville, at the intersection of the Mississippi and Bayou Lafourche, was a very important depot of distribution for the Baratarians. These photographs show the bayou and the town as they look today.

CLAIBORNE OFFERS A REWARD FOR LAFITTE

This was too much! The shooting of an officer could not be officially ignored.

On November 24th Governor Claiborne issued another proclamation—this one with teeth in it—offering \$500 Reward for the apprehension of Jean Lafitte:

“I do solemnly caution all and singular the citizens of the State against giving any kind of succor to the said Jean Lafitte and his associates, but to be aiding and abetting in arresting him and them, and all others in like manner offending; and do furthermore, in the name of the State, offer a reward of \$500, which will be paid out of the treasury to any person delivering the said Jean Lafitte to the Sheriff of the Parish of Orleans, or to any other Sheriff in the State, so that the said Jean Lafitte may be brought to justice.”

This trump card of the Governor was posted in public places. In certain quarters it created quite a furor because some very influential citizens had been boasting that Claiborne could never touch Jean Lafitte. The man in the street read it and wondered, as all honest citizens have wondered since laws first confused justice, why a routine arrest was so complicated. Why didn't they simply arrest Jean Lafitte like they would arrest any common lawbreaker who had stolen an article of merchandise from a shop?

The Creoles quietly waited to see what their idol would do and the smugglers carried on business as usual.

Recent repercussions of the war had just reached New Orleans. At the time the redcoats were losing the decision at the mouth of Bayou Lafourche the American “Chesapeake” was being captured by the British “Shannon.” You'll remember this famous sea battle much better, when we remind you that the Commander of the “Chesapeake” was James Lawrence whose dying words were “Don't Give Up the Ship!”

The British Navy was menacing the Atlantic Coast; inland the redcoats had aroused the Indians against the Americans and a General by the name of Andrew Jackson was gloriously upholding the American tradition of putting up a gallant fight with nothing.

The Federal Government was still too busy with its own troubles to help Claiborne, a fact of which Jean Lafitte was well aware. And, although he could not have known the recent reverses which we have just told you, he was thoroughly aware that his men at Grand Terre outnumbered any possible force Claiborne could muster under the circumstances.

Therefore, Jean smiled sardonically as he was shown one of the reward posters but, like a good tactician, refused to comment until he had carefully considered the matter.



LAFITTE OFFERS A REWARD FOR CLAIBORNE

Jean's answer to Claiborne's proclamation would have made the headlines in every newspaper in the United States had there been press wires in those days. It is one of the most classic examples of unmitigated gall encountered in the pages of history.

It was the high point in Jean's career — his last, but most dramatic gesture as New Orleans' most colorful rogue. He was never so popular as he was on that November 26, 1813 — never so beloved by the Creoles as when, two days after Claiborne's reward notice was posted, his own appeared in exactly the same public spots, offering \$1500 Reward (Jean was no piker) for the arrest and delivery of William Charles Cole Claiborne at Grand Terre. The notice was printed in a clever parody of the official proclamation and carried Jean's well known signature.

The populace roared with laughter. Jean's mob psychology was perfect. His clever stunt completely drained all official dignity from the situation and made a joke of law and order.

What a fellow — that Lafitte!

Claiborne was not amused — not because he had no sense of humor but because the public was so oblivious to its own peril. The reward notice reports coming from the streets, as far as Claiborne was concerned, were petty compared to the reports in the dispatches on his desk. It was inevitable that the British would attack New Orleans!

The war with the Indian allies of the British, the Creeks, was going badly. Fort Sims, just twenty-five miles from Mobile, which was less than two hundred miles from New Orleans, had been taken by the savages. Many slaves had escaped from plantations and joined the redskins. Reports on the Choctaws were unfavorable. Claiborne sent an order to all militia leaders to be ready for any emergency. He had made an official trip throughout the State inspecting the almost futile defenses, and had just returned from this trip, tired and desperately worried, when he found it officially necessary to offer the reward for Lafitte.

The British were using every known device to create racial splits. They circulated reports that the French and Spanish would be relieved of the burdensome taxes imposed on them to support this unnatural war — that their property, their laws and their religion would be guaranteed safe from British interference — that any home flying a French or Spanish flag would not be entered or molested by one of their marauding Indian allies. It was a serious situation.

Claiborne did not want Jean Lafitte nearly as badly as he wanted men and munitions to fight a real enemy. Jean was a nuisance but the British were a menace. New Orleans could survive the smugglers — but she might not survive the British regulars.



LAFITTE GETS AWAY WITH MURDER

December's news was still worse. General Flournoy, in command of the U. S. forces on the Mississippi, confidentially informed Claiborne that he could not concentrate more than seven hundred men within the State. News came from abroad that Napoleon was retreating from Moscow, eliminating any help against the British from that quarter. The only good news was that the Tennessee fighter, General Andrew Jackson, with a body of American regulars had routed the Indians around Mobile at the famous battle of Horseshoe Bend, killing six hundred of them.

Jean Lafitte, striking the iron of his popularity while it was white hot, advertised on New Year's Day, 1814, the largest auction yet held at "The Temple." Four hundred and fifteen slaves would be put up for sale, also huge quantities of selected "foreign" merchandise.

Sleepless, harrassed Claiborne called a holiday conference with the United States Collector of Customs. Both knew there was little they could do, but they decided to save official face by dispatching a token force to at least break up the meeting.

Jean, however, had plunged too deeply to avoid bloodshed any longer. Under the command of a man by the name of Stout, the twelve law enforcement officers were attacked before they drew near "The Temple." Stout was killed and two of his men fatally wounded. The rest were held prisoners.

Since the customers were unaware of what had taken place out in the bayous, the auction, of course, was a sell-out. Buyers from every part of the State attended. Publicity certainly was helping the Baratarians.

Claiborne's reaction to the report of the death of Stout was furious but futile. He wrote immediately to the State Legislature asking for aid, admitting that federal help, due to military emergencies, was not available. He mentioned in his letter the necessity of preventing a "further miscarriage." He referred not to the defeat of the customs patrol, but to a more ignominious fact concerning a body of militia which, some time before, had been ordered out to break up the smuggling. They had been surprised, taken captive, transported to Grand Terre where Jean had personally wine and dined them and sent them home, unarmed but happy, laden with beautiful presents.

The Legislature, instead of acting, appointed a committee!

In March, Claiborne tried again—this time asking the Legislature for permission to raise, by voluntary enlistment, a force of one hundred militia, properly commanded, for the purpose of dispersing the Baratarians.

This was a mistake. The Legislature not only politely disciplined him by ignoring the request, but the people thoroughly resented the idea of enlisting citizens to handle a distasteful military job. One of the newspapers referred to him as a "tyrant."

Claiborne found himself more powerless than ever.



Manila Village on Barataria Bay as it exists today.
Look closely and you will see that the owner's flag
on one of the boats still carries the skull and cross
bones — the Jolly Roger of piracy.

PIERRE IS ARRESTED WITHOUT BAIL

Frankly, we have a hunch that underneath it all Claiborne and Lafitte secretly admired each other. Claiborne was, unfortunately, the early nineteenth century's victim of "too little, too late." Jean, as we have insisted several times, had been lucky for ten years. Reversing the roles, Jean could have done no more than Claiborne did.

However, Claiborne was not licked — only stopped. He decided to try a new strategy — a hand picked Grand Jury chosen from New Orleans citizens whose sympathies coincided with his official wishes. This Grand Jury was called secretly. In closed panel they examined witnesses. On the basis of testimonies heard, charges of "piracy" were made officially for the first time and the Grand Jury returned indictments against Jean Lafitte, Pierre Lafitte, Dominique You, Beluche and others.

Once he had secured the indictment Claiborne dared waste no time. He sent officers immediately to the favorite hangouts of the smugglers. Pierre, unaware that the indictment had been returned, was caught helpless near the Place d'Armes.

It was just a few steps to the Calabozo, the stout old Spanish prison built against the Cabildo. Here he was locked up in a little cell scarcely larger than a dungeon.

Jean, Beluche and Dominique You, warned by Pierre's arrest, avoided capture, and Jean, through his representatives, sent bail for Pierre. It was refused. The authorities knew very well that Pierre would jump any cash bond they imposed.

The Lafittes, for the first time, were in serious trouble and Jean decided to get the best lawyer in New Orleans. That would be United States Attorney for the State of Louisiana — John Grymes.

The fact that Grymes would officially be charged with Pierre's prosecution deterred Jean not one second. Like all gangsters, he had faith in the power of money. Besides, off the record, he and John Grymes were good friends. Long hours they had spent together in the coffee houses, perhaps joking about the loopholes of the law through which a really clever fellow could always squeeze.

Jean, not daring to show his face on the streets, sent a messenger asking lawyer Grymes to meet him at Pierre's house "on a purely personal matter."

Grymes came. Over a decanter of brandy the two men talked earnestly for hours. Jean, realizing that this was no time for bargaining, made his first offer large enough to be attractive to even State's Attorney Grymes — \$20,000 a year retainer fee to act as the Lafitte counsel.



Above: The Place d'Armes (now called Jackson Square) as it is today.

Below: The cell in the Calabozo in which Pierre was imprisoned.



JEAN HIRES LOUISIANA'S GREATEST LAWYERS

Grymes hesitated. It would be necessary to resign from his present powerful position and throw in his lot, irrevocably, with the pirates. Neither he nor Jean shied away from the word now. But, even if he did that, there was still powerful legal talent that could be used by the State against them — Edward Livingston.

"All right," countered Jean. "Twenty thousand dollars for him, too —"

This removed Grymes' last objection. He agreed that if Livingston could be persuaded to act as counsel with him, he would accept the case. As they parted, Grymes a little flushed with brandy and the enormity of the step he had just taken, boasted that "Livingston and I can get you out of Hell if necessary."

Livingston also accepted and once more New Orleans was stunned by the audacity and cleverness of that man Lafitte. Both lawyers were Americans. Neither had Creole blood. Grymes was the leading practicing lawyer in the city and a public official. Livingston had drafted the code of procedure used for years in Louisiana law. He was Claiborne's right hand man and personal friend.

Opinion was divided. The Creoles maintained that if two such high calibre men as Grymes and Livingston had taken the case the brothers Lafitte and the smugglers must be innocent of piracy. The citizens who had always opposed Lafitte claimed that blood stained gold had bought two more souls.

So hot grew the feeling in New Orleans that the District Attorney, who succeeded Grymes, stated in open court that Grymes had been seduced from the path of honor. Grymes challenged him — and they repaired to the duelling park where Grymes neatly shot the opposing lawyer through the hip, crippling him for life.

History will never sufficiently explain why Livingston decided to defend the pirates. Grymes was by nature reckless and a lover of adventure. We believe he was as much influenced by the fun he would get out of it as by the fee. But Livingston was fifty, conservative and rich. His reputation was secure. He didn't need the money nor did he fraternize with Lafitte.

Edward Livingston had one of the finest records and most stainless reputations a man of law could build in fifty years. He was a graduate of Princeton, had been elected to Congress in 1795, was United States Attorney under President Jefferson, was subsequently elected Mayor of New York and came to New Orleans in 1803. Immediately this American lawyer attained fame in this Creole stronghold. He and Grymes made a powerful combination.

But — even these two famous legal lights could not secure Pierre's release.



John Randolph Grymes, the State's Attorney who relinquished a promising public career to defend the pirates.

Co-counsel with Grymes was Edward Livingston, in whose honor was named a Louisiana parish and the fort later built on Grand Terre.



THE BRITISH TRY TO BRIBE THE BARATARIANS

All summer Pierre cursed away the hot days in jail. Grymes and Livingston resorted to every legal device known to jurisprudence to effect his release and failed. They even petitioned his removal on the basis that confinement was ruining his health—a very clever strategy, indeed, because it was true. But the medical examiners denied the petition.

Synchronizing these events with the war, the British forces had marched on Washington—President Madison fled, leaving his dinner on the table—and Dolly Madison hastily followed carrying the Declaration of Independence under her arm, just about the same moment the doctors refused Pierre Lafitte's request for release. English war ships had been sighted in the Gulf of Mexico. The invasion of Louisiana was just a matter of time.

On September 3rd, Lafitte's men on Grand Terre were startled by a cannon shot from the Gulf. Anchored outside was a British man-of-war. Lafitte's investigating boat was met by the warship's gig in which were three English officers, two in naval uniform and one in the army scarlet. They carried a white flag of truce under which the Baratarians warily allowed them to come within hailing distance.

Captain Lockyer of his Majesty's Navy wished to communicate with Mr. Lafitte. Jean welcomed them graciously and invited them to partake of his hospitality.

The Britishers pompously endeavored to state their errand but Jean, for hours, insisted on plying them with wine, delicious foods and all the limitless luxuries of Grand Terre. Finally, when cigars were lit and the glow of good wine had flushed the visiting gold braids, Jean professed his interest in their visit.

They handed him two documents, both as official as imposing signatures and sealing wax could make them. One was a proclamation from the English Government calling on all Louisianans to join the British against the Americans, appealing to them to rescue their beloved French and Spanish soil from the usurpers.

The second bid frankly for the services of "Mr. Lafitte, Commandant at Barataria," and promised rewards to him and his men. Captain McWilliams was there to personally offer Jean thirty thousand dollars in cash and the commission of Captain in the British Navy.

In the cleverly worded missives was also the veiled threat that, should the Baratarians refuse the magnanimous British offer, reprisals would be made on the pirates for previous attacks on English merchantmen.

All Jean said was, "Your plan seems almost perfect," and asked for fifteen days in which to talk it over with his men.

Confident that a pirate could be bought, the English officers left, feeling certain that the answer would be favorable.

Jean Lafitte deceives the British—plays for time by convincing them he is interested in their proposal that the Baratarians lead an attack through the back door of New Orleans.



JEAN OFFERS HIS BARATARIANS TO CLAIBORNE

We do not think that Jean Lafitte seriously considered the British offer for a second. He was a smuggler, a privateer and accused of being a pirate; he was French and had defied the U. S. Government for years — but he considered himself an American.

This was his land. He might be one of its most harmful citizens, but he had no intention of letting any outsiders touch a leaf of Louisiana if he could stop them.

However, let's also be sensible. Jean had both himself and Pierre to consider. His brother was in jail. A price was on his own head. How could he best turn this marvelous opportunity that had been placed in his lap to his own advantage and still outsmart those stuffy British who figured he could be bought for a measly thirty thousand dollars? If the English had a sense of humor, he could believe they were trying to duplicate the Biblical thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas.

Jean would not stop his feud with Uncle Sam. That was a personal matter. But no redcoats were going to muscle in.

So, Jean sat down and wrote two very scholarly letters — one to John Blanque, a friend in the State Legislature, and the other to Governor Claiborne. In these missives he told them of the British proposal. He affirmed that he had never ceased to be a good citizen and assured them that all of his offenses were forced upon him by certain vices in the laws. He explained how the British had used his brother's imprisonment to influence him against America. He admitted that he had asked for fifteen days in which to give the British their answer and asked respectfully that within that time he be given judicious advice on how to proceed.

In his letter to Claiborne he definitely asked for the restoration of the rights of his men who had been indicted and offered his whole force in the coming defense of Louisiana.

Enclosing all the British documents he dispatched both letters by special messenger to the city and waited impatiently.

On the same night that Blanque received his message Pierre Lafitte somehow escaped from prison. And, while he was on his way to Grand Terre through the bayous, an official conference was going on in the Governor's office regarding the validity of the Lafitte offer. Were the letters genuine? Could the Governor hold intercourse with pirates? The committee voted "No" to both questions, although not unanimously.

When Pierre, wan and weary, reached his brother's house, Jean quickly told him what had happened and from then on the two brothers paced the veranda for days, impatiently sending pirogues out to see why the reply to Jean's letters was not on its way.

REGISTER.

1000 piastres de récompense
SERONT payées à quiconque arrêtera
 PIERRE LAFITTE qui, la nuit
 dernière, a forcé la prison de paroisse et
 s'est évadé. Ledit Pierre Lafitte est de
 la taille de 5 pieds 10 pouces, fortement
 constitué, a un beau teint et les yeux un
 peu de travers. On croit inutile d'en
 donner une plus ample description, ledit
 Lafitte étant très-connu en cette ville.
 Ledit Lafitte a emmené avec lui trois
 nègres, savoir: Sam jadis la propriété de
 Mr. Sawza; Cézar, appartenant à Mr.
 Lefebvre; et Hamilcar, appartenant à Mr.
 Jarnand. La récompense ci dessus sera
 donnée à quiconque délivrera ledit Lafitte
 au soussigné, qui payera aussi cinquante
 piastres pour chacun desdits nègres.

7 Septembre — J. H. Holland,
 Geôlier.
 Etat de la Louisiane. — Cour de

(Translation of Reward Offered for Pierre
 in Louisiana Courier, Sept. 7, 1814)

\$1,000 REWARD

Will be paid to whoever arrests Pierre Lafitte who, the past night, broke from the parish prison and escaped. The said Pierre Lafitte is 5 feet, 10 inches tall and of robust stature, a fine complexion and slightly cross-eyed. It is believed that a more complete description is useless as he is so well known in this city.

The said Lafitte took with him three negroes, to wit: Sam, formerly the property of Mr. Sawza; Cezar, belonging to Mr. Lefebvre; and Hamilcar, belonging to Mr. Jarnand. The above reward will be given to whoever will deliver the said Lafitte to the undersigned who also will pay fifty dollars for each of the said negroes.

J. H. Holland
 Jailer

GRAND TERRE DESTROYED!

Commodore Patterson of the United States Navy and Colonel Ross of the Army were now in New Orleans, having been sent there to protect the city. Their combined force was pathetically small to resist the British but plenty to attack the Baratarians.

These two officers had definitely decided that before they got mixed up in the big job they would clean up this little matter of the pirates. The Navy had been looking forward to this opportunity for years. Commodore Patterson minced no words — Lafitte's freebooters were pirates as far as he was concerned. For several weeks he and Ross had been making preparations to liquidate Grand Terre and were practically ready when Jean's messages arrived.

They were in the conference that was called to decide what to do with Jean's offer to help defend New Orleans in return for a few blanket pardons. Patterson and Ross emphatically voted against entering into any dealings with the criminals. Besides, they didn't want any interference with their completed plans.

Even if Claiborne had wished to accept Lafitte's offer (and we doubt it) what could he say? For years he had been pleading for ships to clean up the smugglers' stronghold. Now that the Navy was finally here could he change his tune?

No, we can't blame Claiborne, Patterson and Ross. To these practical men it looked exactly like the phony plan of a clever rascal.

Lafitte's luck had changed. Instead of a favorable message from New Orleans his spies reported that an overwhelming force was about to move on Grand Terre. In the meantime the British ship had tired of waiting for Jean's answer and had sailed away.

On September 11th, three barges loaded with men and ammunition started down the Mississippi. At the mouth of the Mississippi they were joined by six gunboats and the schooner "Carolina." For the first time an American force large enough to do the job was moving against the buccaneers.

On the 16th, they came in sight of Grand Terre. Because they approached from the Gulf the Baratarians thought they were the British returning. So, cannons were placed in position on the beach and the pirate gunners stood ready with lighted matches to defend their lair.

When they saw the American flag, consternation hit the hundreds of smugglers and privateers massed in back of the guns to repel landing parties. There wasn't a man there willing to fire on those colors. They scattered and fled, abandoning everything.

Patterson and Ross landed without firing a shot. A few captives were taken, including Dominique You. The soldiers broke open the warehouses and took possession of more than five hundred thousand dollars' worth of merchandise for the U. S. Government.



YILDEN LANDRY

The soldiers burn the homes of the Baratarians on Grand Terre.

THE BARATARIANS SCATTER

Jean Lafitte had said he would never fight the United States. To keep his word — that September morning — he sacrificed his island empire, nearly a million dollars' worth of property and ten years of painstaking work.

It wasn't fear. His buccaneers would have defended that beachhead to the last man against any other flag. It wasn't panic. They were waiting calmly to give what they thought were British ships a lead and iron welcome. Nor was it weakness. In spite of the superiority of the American task force, there were twenty cannon insolently pointed seaward, thirteen ships whose daily work was warfare and over a thousand of the finest professional fighters in existence — massed there ready to defend their own backyard with the savagery of wild beasts.

Later events proved that what happened was the strange alchemy of America. These men, these pirates had been transformed — nobody knows when or how — into Americans every bit as loyal to their country as Patterson's sailors or Ross' soldiers. They were definitely on opposite sides of the law, but as far as the men of Lafitte were concerned, just as definitely on the same side of the flag.

This is a fine technical point, we will admit. But — think this over. There are localities in America today where you can muster hundreds of criminals who will break any law you name if the payoff is high enough. But try to persuade those same men to join their country's enemies to fight American soldiers at any price!

Lafitte and his men were on a tough spot. They wouldn't fire on the flag. They couldn't remain to be captured. So, they did the only thing left. They fled.

Jean and Pierre, with a large body of men, made their way to Lake des Allemands — German's Lake. Others of the Baratarians headed for Last Island. Only about one hundred were captured. Over eight hundred got away in small boats with nothing except the clothes on their backs.

Ross' soldiers burned forty houses of different sizes, captured intact nine ships, the twenty cannon and the loot already mentioned. The destruction of Grand Terre was done efficiently and took several days. Colonel Ross returned to New Orleans and reported his success and, on October 15th, Claiborne reported his gratification to James Monroe.

Grand Terre was no longer a pirates' nest. Officers and men of the U. S. Navy task force now occupied it to guard this Gulf entrance from the threatened British invasion.

Officially, Jean Lafitte's community of corsairs was destroyed. The smugglers had lost their homes. The privateers had lost their ships. The Lafittes had lost their property and prestige. It looked like a pretty effective job of liquidation.



Last Island—L'Île Dernière—was Lafitte's westernmost seabase. Close to the Bayou Teche and Sabine River country, near to the entrance of Bayou Lafourche, it was equally as important as Grand Isle or Grand Terre in the strategy of the smugglers.

After the days of Lafitte, as the century became more civilized, Last Island, with its beautiful sloping beach, became a favorite resort of the rich and idle from all Louisiana.

And thus it remained—first a smugglers' rendezvous and then a swimmers' paradise—until the terrible storm of 1856. Out of the sea and sky came a storm so terrible that the island was split in two—all of its occupants were killed except those saved by the gallant little steamer STAR—and nothing was left alive except, by a strange sense of humor of the elements—a cow.

Today, L'Île Dernière, practically deserted, patiently watches the Gulf for the return, perhaps, of those boisterous but friendly buccaneers. She is lonesome.

CLAIBORNE CHANGES HIS MIND

New Orleans had no opportunity to either gloat or mourn over the Baratarians. Claiborne was laboring night and day trying to stir an apathetic legislature and an indifferent population to the extreme peril of the city.

Dispatches reached him constantly that more and more British vessels were sighted in the Gulf. It is true the militia was training desultorily in the chill October rains, but cold figures showed that the enemy, from reports received, would outnumber the city's defenders three to one.

Edward Livingston, Lafitte's attorney, headed a Citizens' Meeting in which numerous and respectable leaders in the community swore allegiance to the United States and signed an agreement to "repel every attempt to weaken the force of the country by exciting dissensions and jealousies at a moment when union is most necessary" and a committee was formed to cooperate with the constituted civil and military authorities.

Livingston was also busy with Grymes and Jean Lafitte, who sneaked into the city for secret conferences. These two lawyers counselled patience. They had prepared a suit against the United States for the recovery of the property confiscated at Grand Terre, but advised waiting until after the battle which everybody knew was coming closer every day. If Louisiana were taken by the British any suit would be useless—in fact they would be lucky to escape alive. But—advised counsel—if the military authorities could still be persuaded to accept the help of the Baratarians both the chances of the city and the chances of Lafitte recovering his property would be increased.

On October 24th, Livingston wrote to President Madison recommending a general pardon for the privateers which would immediately add at least five hundred fighting men to the city's defenses.

Six days later, Claiborne wrote a similar letter to the Attorney General of the United States. He explained that smuggling was not considered a crime in Louisiana and said that many a local Creole would say proudly, "My grandfather or my husband, or my father was, under the Spanish Government, a great smuggler—and he was always esteemed an honest man." He asked for forbearance of prosecution against all except the leaders. Claiborne was a very clever man. He could officially recognize two facts. One was that the Baratarians, as smugglers, were a menace to normal New Orleans. The other was that these same Baratarians, to threatened New Orleans, would be a decided asset to its military strength.

Jean Lafitte was everywhere, keeping under cover, however. He had reorganized his men at Last Island where they had again built their palmetto shelters and rigged out their small boats. To the man, they waited for his next orders. Jean had not given up the hope that the United States would accept his offer to fight alongside the rest of Louisiana free men.



The last crumbling remains of Fort Livingston, which was built on Grand Terre in 1841 to command the approach to Barataria Bay as had Lafitte's red brick house before it. Below is a half buried cannon on Grand Terre, a mute reminder of the island's exciting past.



LAFITTE CALLS ON GENERAL JACKSON — UNINVITED

General Jackson, when the Lafitte proposal had been transmitted to him at Mobile, rejected the offer with scorn — having already denounced the British for their unmilitary overtures to “robbers, pirates and hellish banditti.” That, however, was in September.

On the 14th of November, General Jackson wrote Governor Claiborne that information had been received of an expedition of twelve or fifteen thousand men from Ireland intending to attempt the conquest of Louisiana. And, on December 2nd, Old Hickory arrived at New Orleans to personally conduct the defense of the city.

He was ill, but had ridden horseback from Mobile accompanied by only a half dozen of his officers. He had just successfully completed one hard and long campaign and was here to save New Orleans or die in the attempt. His face was jaundiced and emaciated but his eyes were black, piercing and restless. The body may be ill but the will that drove it was indomitable.

As soon as he arrived, Jackson checked the resources of the city for defense. It didn't take long. There were Patterson's small navy, Ross' seven hundred regulars and about a thousand militia who had responded at the last minute. This was a sorry picture — especially with twelve thousand trained British regulars, fresh from victories over Napoleon, on their way to attack.

The armament situation was even worse. Guns were few, ammunition little and many of the available weapons useless because of a shortage of flints.

We ask you to note that a report on these supplies was dictated by Jackson to Edward Livingston, who, as soon as the General arrived at New Orleans, served as his military secretary. Therefore, it was not strange that Lafitte should learn of the arms shortage.

This, Jean realized, was his last ace in the hole. Hidden in a secret storehouse on the marshes he had a great quantity of flints and ammunition. Nobody knew about this — not even Grymes and Livingston.

With this knowledge, Jean decided to cut all red tape, eliminate his lawyers and take the long gamble. The next day Jean Lafitte, from nowhere, appeared at Jackson's Headquarters and demanded an interview.

We will never know what happened at that meeting, but we do know that these men, once they were face to face, understood each other. We are inclined to believe that Jackson, in whose soul was the purest distillate of American patriotism, recognized in this erstwhile pirate a sincerity as free of personal selfishness as his own.

All we know, officially, is that General Jackson, as Military Head of New Orleans, accepted the seven thousand five hundred flints which Lafitte offered as well as the services of his Baratarians.



FROM PIRATE TO PATRIOT

Dominique You and the Baratarians held in jail were released. Dominique You and Rene Beluche, both skilled cannoneers, were sworn in as captains and put in charge of artillery units.

Word was sent to Last Island and the pirates swarmed into the city to enlist. Overnight the official status of Pierre and Jean Lafitte changed from "pirate" to "patriot."

Some of the Baratarians were sent to man the siege guns of forts Petites Coquilles, St. John and St. Philip and a large number were enrolled in the artillery units of Dominique You and Beluche. We note with interest that General Jackson no longer referred to them as "hellish banditti." In his reports they were formally classified as "these privateers."

We know that Patterson did not approve, nor perhaps Ross. We are certain the city, as a whole, welcomed these men who were, in reality, yesterday's friends. Claiborne, we must remember, had requested their pardon. Livingston and Grymes, of course, must have smiled at the whimsical pranks of Destiny. But — again we are forced to recognize the strange dual nature of Jean Lafitte. While this represented a personal triumph, we honestly believe that he was more pleased with the fact that he and his men were finally recognized and accepted as Americans than he was gratified at the sudden change in his own fortunes.

While the Baratarians were absorbed into the city's slowly growing but still meagre forces, the five American gunboats were defeated by a British fleet on Lake Borgne and New Orleans' seapower was practically wiped out.

Then, on December 23rd, three men galloped into town announcing that the vanguard of the British invading army was encamped on the Villeré plantation, only nine miles down the Mississippi.

Late that afternoon General Jackson, swaying in his saddle with fever, reviewed the troops that must — somehow — save New Orleans.

Slowly they passed. There were only two regiments of regulars, a few marines and army artillerymen; the New Orleans riflemen; the cavalry raising a cloud of dust; the Mississippi dragoons and the fighting Tennesseans whom Jackson had brought with him; the Creole troops; a few companies of colored freemen; the Baratarians; a small group of Choctaw Indian allies.

Jackson watched two thousand, one hundred and thirty-one men pass by. That was all. There were no more . . . and half of them had never seen action before. With them, however, he must stop 12,000 redcoats.

Against a force six times his size, trained on the battlefields of Europe, equipped with the best military weapons of the day, General Jackson confidently led an army that he had seen on review for the first time that afternoon — led them to "attack."



Dominique You (with rolled up sleeves, upper left) annihilates the British with accurate cannon fire at the Battle of New Orleans.

THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS

Although the decisive battle of New Orleans did not take place until January 8th, Jackson's attack on the British on December 23rd, before they were fully organized, really saved Louisiana. Pakenham's haughty grenadiers were so amazed that these ragged riflemen would not wait until they could, in the approved military fashion, advance and eliminate them that they sat back on their heels, firmly convinced there must be thousands of mad Americans.

As a result, Jackson had a little time to entrench, secured a couple of thousand reinforcements and was ready with his tiny tatterdemalion-army, on January 8th, to argue the matter Indian fighter fashion with the pick of Europe's soldiers.

The attack began at dawn. The British advanced in massed formation against the American forces behind their earthenwork defenses. The Tennessee riflemen, spitting "chawing tobacco" between shots, calmly picked off the brilliant red targets like clay pigeons. Dominique You and Beluche, sighting along their "Long Toms," gave the British a never to be forgotten lesson in how to lay a temperamental cannon ball right in the middle of a massed mess of British regulars.

The story comes down to us that General Jackson, sitting his horse and sipping black coffee while watching Dominique You serve his battery, remarked to his aid: "If I were ordered to storm the gates of Hell, with Captain Dominique as my lieutenant, I would have no misgivings of the result."

We all know the amazing results of the Battle of New Orleans. Historians estimate the British losses at three thousand men, killed, wounded or missing, plus the death of General Pakenham. The American casualties, believe it or not, were only thirteen killed, thirty-nine wounded and nineteen missing.

You may have heard that Jean Lafitte was not at the Battle of New Orleans. That was true—simply because General Jackson had ordered him elsewhere. He was first sent to protect the city from a rear attack from the Gulf. With a company of his own Baratarians he was stationed near the Temple, guarding the back door. Jackson knew that Lafitte, better than any man alive, could thwart an attack through the bayous.

However, before noon, he was ordered back to Chalmette. General Jackson, not aware of the terrible carnage American marksmanship had caused among the British, and expecting another attack, sent Lafitte and General Humbert (again living, not dreaming, deeds of glory) across the river to strengthen the flank.

Jean was seen several times in the American lines that day, obeying and executing orders like a good soldier.

PAY ROLL of a Company of <i>Louisiana Infantry</i> commanded by <i>Capt. J. M. ...</i>									
in the service of the United States, <i>Company ...</i>									
No.	NAMES	RANK	Pay	Pay	Pay	Pay	Pay	Pay	REMARKS
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Reproduction of the payroll of Dominique You's battery at the Battle of New Orleans.

THE VICTORY BALL

Jean Lafitte and the Baratarians found themselves heroes in that mad period of hysterical joy following the Battle of New Orleans.

On January 21st, Jackson issued general orders in which he commended, by name, the gallant conduct of Dominique You and Rene Beluche and stated that the brothers Lafitte had exhibited great courage—that the Baratarians, all of them, had redeemed their pledge to defend their country with high honor.

Grymes and Livingston filed their suit to recover the vessels and property confiscated by Patterson and Ross at Grand Terre. John Dick, the Attorney General, recommended to Claiborne that the charges against the smugglers be dropped, and Claiborne agreed.

On the 23rd of January, New Orleans celebrated a public thanksgiving at the Place d'Armes. At the stroke of twelve, General Jackson entered the river gate with his staff and proceeded through an arch of triumph. This gala occasion was probably more of an ordeal for Old Hickory than the field of Chalmette.

On that night there was a Victory Ball at which, for the first time, Jean Lafitte was publicly accepted socially. Both he and General Jackson were the idols of the hour. Many of the Creole and American women had never before had a chance to meet Old Hickory and Lafitte, the Pirate. Both of these men amazed the fair sex with their charm and poise and ability to exchange bon mots. History also tells us that Claiborne, General Jackson and Lafitte chatted and laughed and enjoyed each other's company like old friends.

On February 6th, a grateful government showed its appreciation by granting full pardon to every Baratarian who could submit proof that he had taken part in the successful defense of New Orleans. One month, almost to the day, after the defeat of the British, President Madison placed his name on the historic document that gave back to Jean Lafitte and his followers "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"—the greatest reward for valor America could grant.

This should have been the start of a new life for Jean Lafitte. It looked so simple. He was a hero, a patriot and a citizen of the United States with no conditions or stipulations. He was accepted as an equal by the aristocracy and idolized by the ordinary citizen. Tomorrow he could put behind him the mistakes of yesterday and carve for himself a new career in this city, where he had many friends, money still in the bank and powerful connections.

It was not that easy. New Orleans could not forget and Jean, himself, could not quit the life he had led a few weeks before. As the intoxication of the victory wore off, New Orleans began to give sober thought to the old stories of piracy. Jean grew restless and impatient to recover the vessels and merchandise seized at Grand Terre.



THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Before the Lafitte lawsuit, briskly pushed by Grymes and Livingston, could come up for trial the ships and contraband seized at Grand Terre were offered by the Government at public auction. This looked like a fatal blow to Lafitte, but great was the surprise of the town when it became known that Sauvinet, Lafitte's financial representative, was the successful bidder.

Yes, wagged the tongues, Jean had bought back his own boats. The Baratarians were going into business again.

Lafitte, intelligent as he was, failed to realize that the days of privateering were over. Now that the United States and Great Britain had declared peace, there were no major nations fighting each other. The ships of the world powers could no longer be attacked and pillaged under the excuse of "prizes of war."

In addition to that, Patterson's destruction of Grand Terre followed closely by the Battle of New Orleans had effectively shattered the Lafitte monopoly in the Gulf. Gambi had gone out on his own immediately and, as early as April 5th, Claiborne advised Commodore Patterson that the troublesome Italian had captured two American ships bound for New Orleans. Beluche, highly recommended by General Jackson, had accepted a commission as Commodore in the young Venezuelan Navy. Dominique You, tired of life on the sea, decided to take advantage of his lucky turn in fortune. He made arrangements to continue his life in New Orleans, where he was very popular, and later became a leader in ward politics. "Nez Coupe" decided to go to Grand Isle and become a peaceful fruit farmer. Of the leaders, only Pierre and Jean wanted to reconstruct their lives exactly as they had been before.

There was a third factor which the Lafittes did not seem to realize. Their days of impunity were over. Their luck had run out. Claiborne was no longer a helpless official. Military and naval assistance were under his orders. Furthermore, the Presidential pardon covered only past offenses. The Government did not intend to overlook any future falls from grace committed by Jean Lafitte or anybody else. No longer was New Orleans an isolated, ignored settlement. It was the Southwest corner of the new, virile, victorious Republic and that Republic intended to keep its reputation clean both nationally and internationally.

Last, but not least, popular opinion had tired of smugglers. Lafitte's piratical pranks were no longer a source of pride to the Creoles. They would have no part of it now.

Jean, however, was not alone in disfavor. General Jackson had incurred the displeasure of the men of the militia and their families, who wanted to be demobilized. However, as military head of New Orleans, he was forced to keep the city under martial law until peace was officially declared. He could take no chances of another attack.

Yes, popularity is a fickle jade. Jean had courted her successfully in New Orleans for ten years. She turned her back on Old Hickory in less than four months.

A Proclamation

I had been long ascertained, that many foreigners flying from the dangers of their home, and that some citizens, forgetful of their duty, had cooperated in forming an establishment on the island of Barataria near the mouth of the river Mississippi, for the purpose of a clandestine and lawless trade. The government of the United States caused the establishment to be broken up and destroyed; and, having obtained the means of designating the offenders of every description, it only remained to answer the demands of justice, by inflicting an exemplary punishment.

But it has since been represented, that the offenders have manifested a sincere penitence; that they have abandoned the prosecution of the worst cause for the support of the best; and particularly, that they have exhibited, in the defense of New Orleans, unequivocal traits of courage and fidelity. Offenders, who have refused to become the associates of the enemy in the way, upon the most seducing terms of invitation; and who have aided to repel his hostile invasion of the territory of the United States; can no longer be considered as objects of punishment, but as objects of a generous forgiveness.

It has, therefore, been seen with great satisfaction, that the general assembly of the state of Louisiana earnestly recommend those offenders to the benefit of a full pardon; And in compliance with that recommendation, as well as in consideration of all the other extraordinary circumstances of the case, I, James Madison, president of the United States of America, do issue this proclamation, hereby granting, publishing and declaring, a free and full pardon of all offences committed in violation of any act or acts of the congress of the said United States touching the revenue, trade and navigation thereof, or touching the intercourse and commerce of the United States with foreign nations, at any time before the eighth day of January, in the present year one thousand eight hundred and fifteen, by any person or persons whatsoever, being inhabitants of New Orleans and the adjacent country, or being inhabitants of the said island of Barataria and the places adjacent; Provided, That every person claiming the benefit of this full pardon, in order to entitle himself thereto, shall produce a certificate in writing from the governor of the state of Louisiana, stating that such person has aided in the defense of New Orleans, and the adjacent country, during the invasion thereof as aforesaid.

JAMES MADISON

By the President,

Jas. Monroe, Acting secretary of state.

JEAN LEAVES THE LAND OF LAFITTE

Not long after the Battle of New Orleans, a Spanish Consul arrived in the city. No longer was Jean's ancient enemy legitimate prey. Any attacks on Spanish shipping would now be considered an act of piracy by the U. S. Navy and dealt with accordingly.

Everything was going against Jean. The suit instituted so optimistically by Grymes and Livingston was bogging down. Reports come to us down through the years that Jean went to Washington and spent sixty thousand dollars entertaining — in a costly and vain effort to lobby his case.

Barataria was still unsafe for smuggling. It was too closely watched. Many of his men had drifted back to their homes on Grand Isle and Cheniere Caminada, but now they were only fishermen. It is true they were bored and ready to return to illicit operations, but Jean could see no way of ever again using Barataria as a headquarters. He evidently intended distributing his loot in New Orleans as before, but he realized he must find a new base of operations.

He tried Port-au-Prince, but that place would have none of his operations.

He became interested in the country west of the Mississippi delta. Here were many of the intricate bayous so necessary for successful smuggling. Three rivers became his temporary operating bases — the Sabine, the Calcasieu and the Mermentau. But, all the time, he was plying the shores of Texas looking for another place as ideal as Grand Terre. Finally he found it at the island of Galveston, where Texas-American revolutionists were gathered.

It was at this point in his career that Jean Lafitte turned spy for Spain, working with the Consul who had come to New Orleans. We will never know why — except that he was hungry for power and perhaps, for the first time, in need of money. It was necessary that he double-cross his own men, who were in sympathy with the Spanish-American patriots, but Jean seemingly conducted the job of double dealing very well.

In 1817 the force of revolutionists who had made Galveston headquarters for their revolution was defeated by a Royalist Spanish army. For a brief period Galveston was deserted.

This was Lafitte's opportunity. He moved in bag and baggage. He began at once to fortify the island and gave his new colony the name Campeachy. A new Lafitte home was erected — Maison Rouge. To the new pirate headquarters flocked his old crews.

Lafitte was back in business — but not at Barataria, the real Land of Lafitte.

One day in 1817 Jean and Pierre, with a small fleet
and a few followers, sailed away from the real Land
of Lafitte forever.



CURTAIN!

Actually our story ends on that April, in 1817, when Jean Lafitte and his men finally abandoned their Louisiana haunts and established themselves at Galveston.

It ends because this is essentially the story of The Land of Lafitte—the story of Barataria, the bayous of lower Louisiana, the cosmopolitan streets of New Orleans and the mighty Mississippi.

The Lafitte that this land knew was the man whom we have tried to portray—the Gentleman Privateer forced into piracy.

We call this The Land of Lafitte because his career here had a reasonable beginning and a glorious finish. What happened at Galveston and on to the end of his life was just a horrible caricature of his career in Louisiana.

You will find many interesting accounts of his exploits in Galveston and on through his career in Mexican waters and Central America, until he finally died. But from the time he left The Land of Lafitte, his story is the ordinary tale of piracy, without excuse and without much variety.

Success evaded him. His second ten years were just as unlucky as his first ten were lucky. We are told that about 1826, with but a handful of faithful followers he contracted fever in Muger Island off the coast of Yucatan and died—buried in a grave over which his men merely piled some stones.

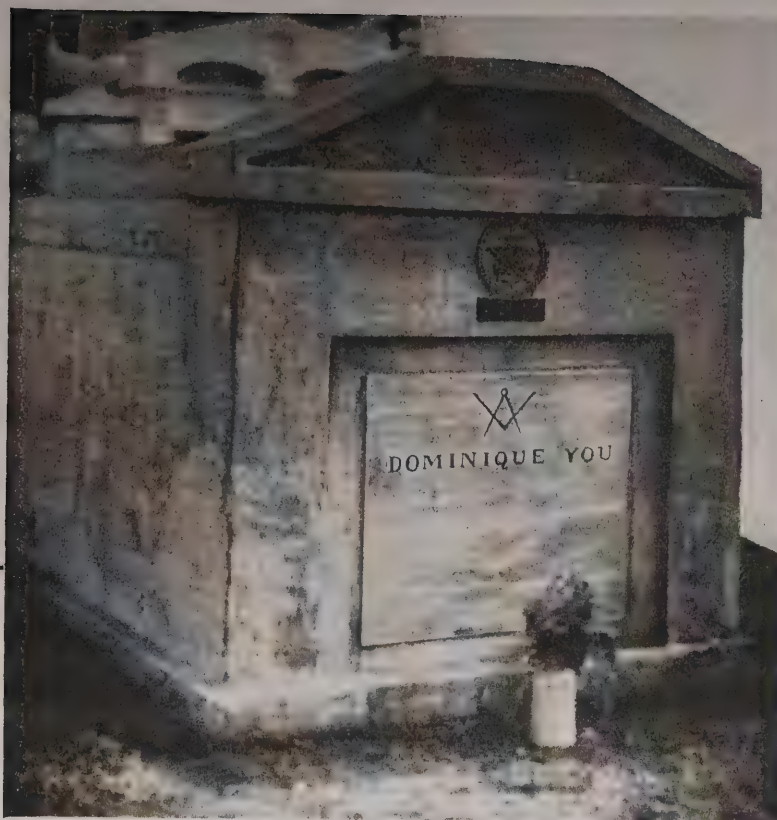
Here was a man whose beginning and ending were both obscured in a dozen conflicting legends. For the person in whom this story has created a desire to learn more about Jean Lafitte, there is material for many an interesting hour in the tales told, every one convincingly, of what happened to him before he adopted and after he departed—The Land of Lafitte.

He was a young man when he arrived at New Orleans. He was not an old man when he left it. The best and most colorful years of his life were the ten we have covered.

The friends of Lafitte—and you can't read about him during his Baratarian days without liking the man—prefer to allow his memory to grow hazy after he was recognized by the President of the United States as one of the heroes of the Battle of New Orleans.

We prefer to remember him paddling down a misty Louisiana bayou and leave him there.

So, with your permission we'll stay right around New Orleans and Barataria until the end of this tale—and not go on to Galveston with Jean and Pierre. There are so many things we haven't told you yet about The Land of Lafitte.



Laid to rest at the expense of the town council with full military honors, Dominique You's tomb bears the emblem of Free Masonry, of which he was one of the founders in New Orleans, and this epitaph in French:

"This warrior bold on land and rolling sea,
in hundred battles proved his bravery.
Nor had this pure and fearless Bayard
known, one tremor, though the world
were overthrown."

THE LEGEND THAT DISAGREES WITH HISTORY

Some twenty miles south of New Orleans near the town of Lafitte (which, until 1912, was known as the town of Barataria) is an ancient burial ground. It lies on a high point of land where the Bayou des Oies flows into Bayou Big Barataria. There, in a tangle of wild rose bushes and tall grass, is an old, sunken grave marked by an iron cross.

Step across the road to the home of Mary Perrin, in whose family plot the grave is located and she will tell you a fantastic story — that here, buried together, are Jean Lafitte, John Paul Jones and Napoleon Bonaparte.

Everybody who visits New Orleans is familiar with the Napoleon House, supposedly built to shelter Bonaparte after Dominique You and friends of the Emperor should rescue him from St. Helena. Before the plan could be completed Napoleon died.

The tale of Mary Perrin states that Napoleon was actually rescued from St. Helena by Jean Lafitte who left a double to fool the English; that on the long voyage to New Orleans, Napoleon died at sea and was brought here to be buried in this lonely grave. We are forced to admit that history has never been able to convincingly prove that the actual Napoleon died at St. Helena, but neither does that prove this Louisiana legend.

The same legend also goes on to state that John Paul Jones, bored with peace after his naval career, joined Lafitte and finally died aboard his own privateer. He, too, was brought here to be buried.

Mary Perrin concludes by saying that Jean was actually killed in a fight with a British ship in the Gulf of Mexico. Before dying he had given orders that his body be sent home and placed with his two friends, Napoleon and John Paul Jones.

The grave is there. Mary Perrin is there. The town of Lafitte, just a short distance below on the bayou, is there. It is not hard to believe such a legend because, as you walk along the bayou, you slip back one hundred and fifty years without trying. Civilization has lightly touched this place. The present seems to stand still. The future never catches up. Only the past seems vital and alive. You'll enjoy a trip to the town of Lafitte and the home of Mary Perrin — to hear this legend first hand.

Strolling through this bayou town will, in itself, be an experience. There are no traffic lights — no stop signs — no worries finding a place to park for these people. Main Street is the bayou. Customers, coming to the general store, pull up to the dock instead of the curb.

Here is a part of the country as typically American as Cape Cod or the mountains of Kentucky. Here is a people with a tradition as American as the Puritans or the First Families of Virginia.

Mary Perrin, proponent of
the legend that so daringly
opposes history.



GRAND ISLE — WHERE TIME FELL ASLEEP

Someday soon America will discover Grand Isle, the most beautiful island of the three that ringed Lafitte's Baratarian empire.

Grand Terre today boasts nothing except its crumbling fort. Last Island has gone, torn asunder in 1856 by a cataclysm of the sea. But Grand Isle remains — as untouched by time as though one of the years, during the life of Lafitte, had fallen asleep here in the drowsy sun and had not yet awakened.

Today the oaks still conceal the homes of the less than seven hundred fishermen and farmers who live here. You wander from neighbor's yard to neighbor's yard — there are no sidewalks, no gutters, no lamp posts, no fire hydrants, no mailboxes. Each home is a little hidden haven behind its screen of oleanders and fragrant blooms.

Living, here, is as God intended living should be. The sun and the healthy sea air tan and temper the bodies of these people. Their closely knit community life makes them tolerant of their neighbors' faults. Kindness to one another is the rule, not the exception.

Peace and contentment are the keynotes of Grand Isle. Even the stranger, once he has caught the friendly spirit of the island, hates to leave its uneventful but satisfying simplicity.

The worries of the world are very far away. It's not a matter of miles. It's a matter of mood. You feel you are in a forgotten Paradise.

Suddenly, as you follow a grassy path, you may come across a grandmere and the grandchildren — just as we accidentally surprised this group. In such knee classes have the stories of The Land of Lafitte come down through the generations. These simple fishermen and farmers were never addicted to paper records but their folklore passes faithfully from one to the other.

Today — as they did a hundred and fifty years ago — before smuggling and privateering beguiled them from honest toil — they exact a living from the sea and the soil, working in the cool of the morning or late afternoon.

The sun pulls no punches on Grand Isle. At noonday the naked eye can hardly stand the white glaring heat. But underneath the trees, back in the lanes and bypaths, it is cool and comfortable and quiet.

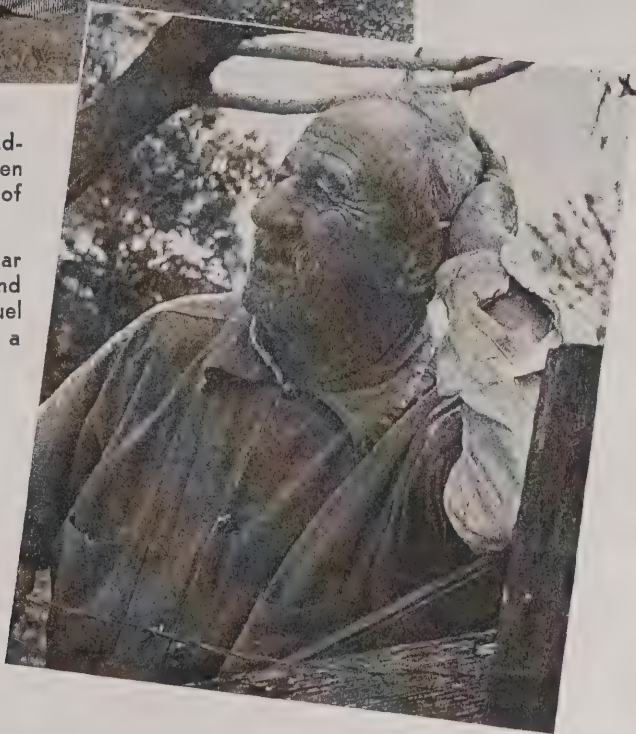
The blue green Gulf is their front yard. Barataria Bay is their backyard. Sea and sun and sand and the simplicity of the ways of life have not changed.

The past stands still at Grand Isle. It is The Land of Lafitte in the time of Lafitte.



Above: A Baratarian grandmother entertaining the children with tales her mother told her of that fellow "Lafitte."

Below: Horace Perrin, 80 year old Baratarian fisherman and trapper, descendant of Manuel Perrin, who was said to be a cousin of Jean Lafitte.



REVIEWING THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

It is only fair to tell you what became of those main characters in our story, who remained in The Land of Lafitte or tried their fortunes in other directions after Jean and Pierre sailed away.

Gambi, always considered the most bloodthirsty and the most troublesome of Lafitte's buccaneers, could not get along even with his own men. As the story goes, they plotted to kill him. One of the crew called to him from the deck of his ship and, as he put his head through the hatch to listen, another decapitated him with an axe.

Of all Lafitte's lieutenants Dominique You was the most popular. He again came into prominence at the time of the plot to rescue Napoleon from St. Helena. Financed by Nicholas Girod, the millionaire-mayor of New Orleans, a swift schooner was to kidnap Napoleon from St. Helena and bring him to New Orleans to the Napoleon House already prepared for his use. Dominique You was one of the leaders in the arrangements.

Dominique, whose real name was Frederic Youx, finally became a political leader. But he was too open handed and generous and died in abject poverty in 1830, too proud to ask for help even in his last illness.

"Nez Coupe" became a peaceful resident of Grand Isle, where he swaggered for years telling of his piratical exploits and his miraculous reformation.

John Randolph Grymes, Lafitte's loyal lawyer, married the widow of Governor Claiborne who died in 1817, after he had retired from the gubernatorial post and was elected to the U. S. Senate. Hot headed, impulsive Grymes fought two more duels during his turbulent life. He later became United States District Attorney.

Andrew Jackson, as every school boy knows, became President of the United States.

Edward Livingston, that astute attorney who cooperated with Grymes in the long defense of Lafitte, succeeded Martin Van Buren as Secretary of State and two years later became Minister to France, as his brother had been before him.

General Humbert, who behaved so rudely at his own birthday dinner but who covered himself with glory at the Battle of New Orleans, finally finished life teaching French. But not before he had tried to promote a little war of his own. About 1816, he enlisted a thousand men in New Orleans, the largest filibustering expedition that ever marched from the city, and fought his way into the heart of Mexico. But the backbone of the Revolution had been broken before he ever got his expedition started, so he finally yielded to the inevitable, disbanded his army and returned to New Orleans to his brandy and French.



One Saturday night on Grand Isle, LIFE Photographer Peter Stackpole snapped one of the descendants of "Nez Coupe" with a Creole belle at the weekly dance where gather old and young—just like they did in the days of Lafitte.

THE LAND OF LAFITTE —
THE FRONTIER OF THE FUTURE

These were colorful characters — these men who were friends, foes and contemporaries of Jean Lafitte.

Two of them, whom we have not mentioned before, are still as controversial in history's pages as Jean Lafitte himself. One was General James Wilkinson, Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United States at the time Lafitte blazed across the Louisiana sky. Wilkinson, called the "Finished Scoundrel" by one author, has the unsavory distinction of being this country's greatest unconvicted and unhung traitor. His double dealings with Spain were amazing examples of duplicity.

The other was Aaron Burr, one time Vice-President of the United States, who hopefully planned to make New Orleans the center of his great fantastic empire. He, too, was a traitor on a grand scale.

These men were important national figures of their day. Alongside their deliberate efforts to undermine the land of their birth, Jean Lafitte's contemporary smuggling and piratical activities were merely misdemeanors.

In this land are a thousand stories about all these men which we do not have the room to recount. But all of them together do not outweigh, in the lore of Louisiana, the tales told with affection about one Jean Lafitte, Gentleman Rogue, whose manners were Creole, whose contempt of authority was typically early American and whose love of the dramatic was typically New Orleanian. It is no wonder he was beloved here. He was composite Louisiana in its most romantic era.

We invite you to come to the Vieux Carre, the French Quarter, where you can follow the historic trail of Grymes and Sauvinet and Jean, as they discussed their plans in the coffee shops.

In the Cabildo and the Louisiana Museum you can trace the controversy between Claiborne and the smugglers through those turbulent ten years. Then we urge a trip down through the bayou country to Grand Isle where the Gulf meets the water wilderness.

By that time you will feel that you know personally every character you have met in these pages.

You would not be surprised at all if you met one of these men suddenly, face to face, on any of these trips. For this is The Land of Lafitte, and, as you meet its people today, you are merely looking into the atavistic eyes of the same Creoles, Baratarians or Americans who, a century and a half ago, made this one of the most interesting spots in the world.

What we have given you here is merely a guide book to the past — the romantic past. You still have the pleasure of discovering for yourself The Land of Lafitte as it is today — the Gateway to the Americas — the Frontier of the Future.



In this Land of Lafitte the soil is generous and the sun is kind. Three crops a year are possible—and as for size—well, in the Cabildo you'll see a cauliflower grown by Judge T. Mercedes Adams on Grand Isle that won a World's Fair Prize—a cauliflower too big to fit in a flour barrel.

THE LAND OF LAFITTE THE PIRATE

GREAT GREAT GRANDFIGHTERS OF THE BARATARIANS

Before we close this story of The Land of Lafitte we want to bring the record up to date — the fighting record of the Baratarians.

Back in 1815, these fishermen-smugglers, just a few weeks after an angry government had wiped out their homes and had branded them as pirates, subject to jail or worse if caught, hesitated not one instant when the opportunity came to fight — not against, but for that same government.

There is not the slightest doubt in the minds of historians that the cool fighting ability of those Baratarian banditti, as Jackson had called them, was a deciding factor in the successful defense of New Orleans.

That fighting strain has survived the diluting influence of nearly a century and a half of peaceful pursuits. The descendants of those Baratarian heroes of the Battle of New Orleans are still the first to respond when their country calls.

As this book goes to press Grand Isle boasts the biggest percentage of volunteers, in proportion to its population (less than 700 men, women and children) of any locality in the country. Twenty boys had enlisted even before the draft went into effect.

One of its fighters, Chief Boatswain Mate Henry Verdon, in service for 13 years, was cited in the Guadalcanal action. At this moment, we are thankful to say, no casualties have been reported from gallant little Grand Isle.

Before we leave these people we ask permission to introduce you to Joseph Clinton Chighizola on the opposite page, Chief Boatswain Mate in the Coast Guard, stationed at Grand Isle.

Chief Boatswain Mate Chighizola is a direct descendant of "Nez Coupe." Meet him and he'll smile at you and welcome you graciously to The Land of Lafitte, where these great grandchildren of glorious fighting stock are really the friendliest, finest folk in the world.

We close reminding you that "a stranger is merely a friend you have not yet met." We hope you will have the privilege of proving soon that on Grand Isle, as well as elsewhere in this lovely Land of Lafitte, are grand people.

The people you'll meet in The Land of Lafitte
Are just like the rest —
North, East or West.

It's a neighborly land you'll soon understand;
It's past is part of
The America you love.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All photographs in this book, with the exception of those specifically credited below, are the work of Eugene Delcroix of New Orleans.

The Jarvis portrait of Lafitte on page 17, Governor Claiborne on page 19 and John Grymes and Edward Livingston on page 93 are reproductions of oil paintings furnished by the Louisiana State Museum.

Permission was granted by LIFE Magazine to use the photographs made by Staff Photographer Peter Stackpole of Mary Perrin on page 119, the Baratarian fisherman on page 121 and the couple dancing on page 123.

Bayou Rigaud on page 27 and Manila Village on page 89 were photographed by Fonville Winans of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

The old military road of Chemin du Fort Blanc on page 59 was photographed by Frank A. McDaniels of New Orleans and the street scene of Donaldsonville on page 83 is the work of Phil Naquin of Thibodaux, Louisiana.

The portrait of Lyle Saxon was made by Wood Whitesell of New Orleans.

We are also indebted to the Louisiana State Museum for permission granted Mr. Delcroix to photograph the inside of the blacksmith shop on page 11, the lithograph of the Cabildo on page 19, the pirogue on page 25, the "Le Brave" agreement on page 75, Pierre's prison cell on page 91, the Reward for Pierre on page 97, the painting of the Battle of New Orleans on page 107 and the pirates' payroll on page 109.

For text source material we are indebted to "Lafitte the Pirate" by Lyle Saxon; "The Buccaneer" by Mitchell V. Charnley; "The History of Louisiana" by Francois-Xavier Martin; "Old New Orleans" by Stanley Clisby Arthur; "History of Slavery" by William O. Blake; "The Port of New Orleans" by Harold Sinclair; "Chita" by Lafacadio Hearn; "The Kentucky" by Thomas D. Clark; files of the Louisiana State Library and Louisiana State Museum; Inventories of the Parish Archives of Louisiana, prepared by Historical Records Survey Projects of Works Projects Administration; the publication "Catholic Action"; the files of the Jefferson Parish Yearly Review; as well as numerous individuals ranging from New Orleans to Grand Isle who contributed valuable data to the compiling of this digest of an era.

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